

# DEATH TREADS SOFTLY



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A CHIEF INSPECTOR  
LITTLEJOHN MYSTERY

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GEORGE BELLAIRS

"ONE OF THE SUBTLEST AND WITTIEST PRACTITIONERS OF  
THE BRITISH DETECTIVE STORY" - NEW YORK TIMES

# **Death Treads Softly**

**George Bellairs**



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**TO**  
**DR. WILLIAM BROCKBANK**

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## THE HARBOURMASTER OF CASTLETOWN

SATURDAY November 6th. The *King Orry*, Liverpool to Douglas, Isle of Man, ploughed her way through seas the colour of lead under heavy skies. There was a slight swell; otherwise the crossing was easy.

Twenty-four hours of endless rain! The downpour had started at noon the previous day, when Littlejohn had first met Finlo Crennell, his travelling companion, and it was still at it. Now, they were eating their lunch in the dining saloon. No pleasure on deck. A meal helped to pass the time away.

Chief Inspector Littlejohn looked up from his plate at the man opposite. Before midday yesterday, he'd never set eyes on him. Another of those strangers who suddenly drifted into his life and then, after a few hours or maybe days, vanished in the crowd and were never seen again.

The man seemed to sense the Chief Inspector's scrutiny, met his gaze, and smiled broadly. Twenty-four hours of the smile that wouldn't come off! They'd even occupied the same room in the Liverpool hotel the night before and Crennell had smiled in his sleep. . . .

A little, robust, powerful man with a rolling gait, who'd once been at sea and then had settled down as harbourmaster of the small port of Castletown, until he'd retired a year ago. Now, he wore a ready-made dark-grey suit which fitted where it touched him and looked as if he'd slept in it for a week. A soft collar and a red tie round his bull neck, and a cloth cap on which he was now sitting because he hadn't known what to do with it when he entered the room.

*Finlo Crennell, aged 66, born Ballabeg, Arbory, Isle of Man. Height: 5 feet, 8½ inches. Eyes blue. Bald. Portly. . . .*

That was how the description had run and the accompanying photograph, an enlarged section of a crowd at some yacht races, had shown a round, smooth face, a sharp little nose, and a head shaped like an orange.

*Missing since October 28th.*

Superintendent Jenks had sent for Littlejohn and he had found him in his office with Finlo Crennell sitting beside him eating ham sandwiches and drinking tea from the canteen.

"I wonder if *you* can do any good with this chap, Littlejohn . . . ."

And Crennell had looked up very happily, munching his bread and ham, and had given the Inspector his now famous perpetual smile.

"He was found wandering about Limehouse last night. He'd been robbed of his pocket-book, if he ever had one, he wore a torn and dirty suit of sailor clothes, and a cap with a Dublin maker's name. No means of identification at all. . . ."

The unknown man looked at the new badly fitting suit they'd given him and smiled with pleasure at it.

"He's lost his memory. There's a nasty mark on the top of his head and the surgeon says its recent, but not too recent. He doesn't know who he is and he doesn't remember a thing, and he seems damned pleased about it, too. . . ."

The man nodded at them and gave them the smile that wouldn't come off.

"It's getting on my nerves, Littlejohn. We've been at him, on and off, for hours. The missing persons files haven't helped us. We've combed them. Seems to have come off some ship or other. All we know is, that when he says anything . . . and it's small talk, saying he's hungry and such like . . . he speaks with a kind of brogue that nobody seems to recognize. It isn't Irish, Scotch or Welsh. And now, here's where you might help. Is it Manx? You've been in the Isle of Man a lot. See what you can do. Him and his smile and his lost memory. He's getting me down."

Littlejohn looked the man over. The orange-shaped head, totally bald except for a thin thatch of fine grey down. The innocent blue eyes. And, of course, the smile.

"How are you getting along?"

"Aw, middlin'."

Littlejohn smiled back.

"*Cannas-Tha-Shu?*" he said.

The blue eyes met Littlejohn's and the smile broadened.

"*Braoo, Braoo,*" replied the stranger.

"What's he say?"

Jenks eyed Littlejohn with suspicion and the Chief Inspector didn't tell him that he'd just uttered the only words of Manx he knew.

"I asked him how he was, and he says he's fine. He's Manx all right."

"We'd better get in touch with Douglas, then."

And that had started it. Finlo Crennell had, on the 28th of October, left his usual pub, the *Jolly Deemster*, in Castletown, at closing time and had apparently walked into the harbour. Two men passing by had heard the splash and a shout and had raised the alarm. There had, more or less, been an all-night search and when they hadn't found Crennell, the local police had assumed his body had been carried out on the ebb tide.

"And now he turns up in Limehouse. The tide can't have ebbed all that way. How did he get there?"

"He must have been picked up and brought to London by some ship or other."

"We're making inquiries, Littlejohn. Meanwhile we'd better get him home. He doesn't know who he is, or where he is, and it isn't safe to let him loose. What about taking him yourself? Get him identified, and then leave him in safe hands. . . ."

"More roast beef, sir?"

The polite steward, with nobody else to look after, bent solicitously over the man without a memory. Again the smile. Crennell must have been starved on his strange travels; since Scotland Yard had picked him up, he hadn't stopped eating, except when smiling in his sleep!

Finlo Crennell ate his meal with robust relish and obvious pleasure. Now and then he would look up at Littlejohn and give him a smile of utmost confidence, like a child who trusts a grown-up to do the right thing.

Littlejohn left his companion still eating and took a stroll on deck to stretch his legs and to smoke his pipe. As they neared the Isle of Man, the rain slackened and gradually changed into drizzle, then a sea mist. The boat checked speed and blew a blast on her siren. From ahead in the fog, the foghorn of Douglas Head lighthouse bleated. Suddenly, they could see the pierhead at Douglas and the *King Orry* glided into the harbour.

The fog wasn't as thick over the land. Visibility reached half-way along the broad sweep of Douglas promenade. In the season, you could hardly toss a coin between the thick mass of holidaymakers; now, there wasn't a soul in sight, except on the quayside, where a compact mass of vehicles, porters and sightseers was waiting for the arrival of the boat.

If Finlo Crennell had left the Isle of Man without dignity, he was certainly arriving back to a fuss. An ambulance, two police cars, a taxi, and



an ancient touring-car with leaking cushions and an old hood. When they saw that the harbourmaster wasn't coming off the boat on a stretcher, they sent the ambulance away.

As Littlejohn and his charge descended the gangway, the official reception party met them. People started to wave to Crennell and he smiled back, as usual, and looked puzzled. Otherwise, he didn't recognize anybody.

From the old touring car emerged the shovel hat, the fine head, the white froth of beard and the gaitered legs of the Rev. Caesar Kinrade, Archdeacon of Man. Littlejohn hastened to him and they met with a warm handclasp.

"I got your message, Littlejohn. You'll be staying with us the night, at least."

From the taxi descended the elderly woman who kept house for Finlo Crennell at Castletown. A small, motherly, peasant type, dressed in black from head to foot and carrying an umbrella and an imitation crocodile skin handbag. When she saw Crennell, she began to weep.

"Whatever have they be doin' to ye, Finlo? We all thought you was dead and we'd never see you again. . . ."

She eyed him up and down and then got annoyed.

"Who's dressed ye up like that?"

She pointed to the natty, ready-made suit which Scotland Yard had provided. She wasn't used to seeing him in anything but his navy blue reefer suit with brass buttons and his jaunty peaked cap.

"I'll get your other suit out an' air it. That one's a disgrace; and who gave you that cap?"

Finlo Crennell kept up his eternal smile, as though thoroughly delighted with it all. It was obvious he didn't recognize anybody, but was quite suited with things as they were.

"He's lost his memory, Mrs. Cottier. . . ."

One of the policemen tried to explain.

"What have they been doin' to ye, Finlo? He'll get it back, won't he? He'll be all right?"

"We'd better be getting along. It'll be dark soon."

The procession started. Two police cars, Mrs. Cottier in state in her taxi, for which Crennell's friends at home had passed round the hat, and Littlejohn, Archdeacon Kinrade and Crennell bringing up the rear in Teddy

Looney's old rattletrap with its canvas hood and side-curtains opaque with age.

Round the quayside, past the Nunnery, and to the Castletown road. Here and there the fog thickened. At Mount Murray it was clear; heavy again at Santon. Through Ballasalla and past the airport, where all the planes were grounded for the day. Then, Castletown.

Littlejohn sat back and enjoyed the ride. It was always the same. As soon as he set foot on Manx soil, the atmosphere got in his blood, as though he breathed in with the very air itself, some sedative essence which soothed his nerves and slowed him up. *Traa di Liooar*. . . . Plenty of time for everything.

"Castletown," said Littlejohn to the harbourmaster, and he watched his face for any recognition.

Finlo Crennell kept smiling, but there seemed a bit of anxiety, a puzzled suggestion in his face now.

"Castletown."

He almost whispered it, savouring it, and then he sighed as though somehow it comforted him.

Early dusk was falling when they reached the town and the mist didn't improve matters. Over the swing bridge, under the shadow of the great castle and into the small square with its lining of trees and fine old houses. The police cars stopped.

"We'll leave you here for the time being, sir. Maybe we'll see you later this evening. Mr. Crennell will be tired and it's not much use botherin' him in his present condition. He'll want his tea."

The homely police sergeant put his head in the touring car and arranged it all. Then he and his mates drove away.

The taxi led the way and Looney's car followed. Round by the side of the church and along a narrow street of small houses with backs facing the sea across Castletown Bay, Queen Street. At a house in the middle of a row, the taxi drew up and Mrs. Cottier got out heavily. She waited at the front door until the rest joined her.

A small cottage, two up and two down, to which Crennell had retired from the large official harbourmaster's house on the quay. Bright brass knocker and letter-box and a fire with the light of flames visible through the window. A few neighbours came to their doors to greet the returned man, but he smiled at them and said nothing. Then, he made for the door of his

own house and tried the knob. He waited until his housekeeper unlocked the door. She turned a delighted look on the parson.

"He knows his own house, you see, Mr. Kinrade. He'll soon be all right again, won't he?"

They entered the living-room and Mrs. Cottier removed her hat and coat, took Crennell's cap, and left to dispose of them. Crennell, meanwhile, sat in his chair. Then he rose again, opened a drawer in the sideboard, took out a pipe and tobacco and started to fill-up. Mrs. Cottier entering noticed it all.

"You see, he knows where he keeps his pipe and tobacco. He'll soon be himself again."

Finlo Crennell took no heed of the comments. He was still like someone who'd been hypnotized and just told to keep smiling.

A cosy room, not overcrowded with furniture; sideboard, two old-fashioned, leather-covered easy chairs, a few small chairs and a corner cupboard. An open, old style grate with three bars holding in the large red mass of coals. Crennell seemed to have settled-in as he did before his adventures.

"Is there anything more we can do, Mrs. Cottier?"

Archdeacon Kinrade seemed anxious to be off and to get his visitor to himself. It was a bit awkward trying to talk to a man who didn't know a thing and whose only replies were nods and smiles.

"We'll be all right, Mr. Kinrade. Now we've got him home again, we'll soon have 'im all right. The doctor's due to call an' see him any time now. Then we'll know just what to do for the best."

The clock on the wall struck five. A small wooden affair with a flashing pendulum and weights and chains. Its steady ticking formed a background for the other noises in the room.

"You're sure you'll be all right?"

"Yes, pazon. I've only to knock on the wall and the neighbours'll come in. And as soon as it gets round the town that he's home, there'll be everybody callin' in to see 'im. The police said they'd come to put another sight on him after tea. Will you take a cup o' tea, the both of ye?"

"No, thanks. We'll be getting along."

Littlejohn strolled over to where Finlo Crennell was contentedly puffing his pipe. He put his hand on the ex-harbourmaster's shoulder.

"You all right now, Mr. Crennell?"

For answer he got again the smile that wouldn't come off.

Even as Littlejohn and the vicar left the house, a large man stood on the doorstep. A nautical type, with blue serge clothes and a cloth cap.

"Has himself got back? I thought I'd be puttin' a sight on him. Everin', Mr. Kinrade. Nice to see ye."

They set off in Teddy Looney's car for Grenaby in the last of the daylight. The mist was still thick in parts and hung over the bridge by the cross-roads just near the vicarage. The river was in full spate, driving its way under the bridge and through the narrows which had once held the mill-race.

The strange and penetrating peace of Grenaby took hold of Littlejohn again. He'd been away twelve months and done a lot in the meanwhile. Now, the intervening time didn't seem to count. It was as if he'd never left the place.

The car pulled-up at the door of the parsonage and Looney stopped his engine. They climbed out into absolute silence. A thick blanket of white mist; a few square yards of clearness, and then, beyond, a world completely muffled to sound and sight. From far away, the foghorn at Langness roared and then left a silence deeper than ever.

There was a shaft of light coming from the fanlight over the vicarage door. They felt their way to it.

"Come in for a cup of tea, Looney. Go right through to the kitchen. Maggie Keggin will see to you."

They took off their outdoor things and went in the parson's study. The same as ever. The place Littlejohn had used for his headquarters a time or two. The old, well-polished mahogany, the books lining the walls, the bright fire and the shaded lamp, with the Hoggatt picture of the Little Fields of Man above the mantelpiece, the focus, as it were, of the room.

"Let me have a look at you. . . ."

The parson put his hands on Littlejohn's shoulders and looked straight into the Inspector's eyes with his own penetrating blue ones.

"How long will you be here with us?"

"Just to-morrow, sir. I'd better see that Crennell is properly settled and then I'll go back by the Monday morning boat. I'll be able to hear your sermon."

"This Crennell business is a bit of a mystery, Littlejohn. The police seem to have the idea he fell in the water after a drink too many and was

picked up by an outgoing boat. There was a Dutch timber boat going out at the time. Could they have taken and dropped him off in London? Or, was it a bit more sinister? Was he shanghaied, or something?"

Littlejohn smiled.

Since the parson had been associated with him in two earlier crimes on the Isle of Man, he was always on the look-out for more mysteries, more cases to solve.

"It seems simple enough, sir. Our people at the Yard are trying to contact the boat you mention and probably it'll all be cleared-up when they do. Crennell, in falling in the harbour, must have caught his head and badly damaged himself. He may have been picked-up by the Dutch boat, which didn't want the trouble of turning back, so took him on to London. There, he seems to have wandered off the ship, got himself robbed, and then walked into the arms of our men in Limehouse. I gather his memory may come back. The surgeon at the Yard said it might mean an operation, however. A spicule of bone, dislodged by the blow, or something."

And then the conversation turned to more personal things until dinner arrived.

"Everin', sir. Good to be puttin' a sight on ye again. . . ."

Maggie Keggin, the parson's housekeeper, entered with a dish of grilled Manx ham, eggs, and fried potatoes. And then there was apple charlotte and fresh cream.

"As soon as she heard you were coming, she started in the kitchen. You're a great favourite there, Littlejohn."

After coffee, they drew up to the fire and lit their pipes. They chatted of all things which interested them and grew drowsy in the heat of the logs. At ten o'clock, Littlejohn telephoned his wife, Letty, in Hampstead, to tell her of his safe arrival.

Strange, every time he rang up the mainland from the Isle of Man, his vivid imagination pictured the cable crossing the dark, watery world under the ocean. Caverns of rock, weird lights, hideous deep-water fishes, ships sailing over the top.

The talk was continued until past eleven. Parson Kinrade kept leading it into criminal channels. All the cases Littlejohn had been engaged on since last they met. Then, cases before that. They were sleepy when they parted, partly from the heat of the room, partly from the Archdeacon's old port which came from a grocer's shop in Kirk Michael.

"They say one of the bishops got the grocer's grandfather ordering that port a century ago and they've sold it ever since."

And after it all, Littlejohn couldn't sleep. It was either the excitement of a full day or the port which hadn't settled down. He felt like he did when a child and was anticipating some big event on the following day and was too excited to fall-off.

He got out of bed once and looked through the window. The fog was thinner and he could see the trees in the garden, but beyond that, a wall of thick darkness.

The foghorn on Langness was still blaring in the distance. Otherwise, not a sound, except the crackings of the house, settling down after the day.

The grandfather clock in the hall struck twelve. Only an hour since they'd retired! It seemed more like three or four. The slow strokes seemed interminable. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve. . . .

And when the clock stopped striking, the telephone took it up. Only more urgently and swiftly.

Littlejohn slipped on his dressing-gown and went downstairs. The parson and his housekeeper must have been fast asleep. There wasn't a sound from either of their rooms. The Chief Inspector groped for the instrument.

"Is that . . . ? Is that you, sir? This is me . . . Inspector Knell, sir. Glad you're back."

Good Heavens! His old associate, the diligent Knell, eagerly ringing him up in the small hours, just to say he was glad Littlejohn was 'over' again!

"Sorry to get you up, sir, if you'd gone to bed. The man you brought over to-day . . . Mr. Crennell, sir . . . Sorry, I couldn't get to the pier to meet you. I was out on a case . . . "

Littlejohn played five-finger exercises on the wall with his spare hand to soothe his nerves. *Traa di Lioor*. Time enough!

". . . He's dead, sir. He must have wandered out of his house. They found him outside the *Jolly Deemster*, his favourite public house. He'd been shot this time. Right through the head. One or two people heard the shot, but with it being the fifth of November only a day ago and the night being wet so they couldn't let off the fireworks on bonfire night, they . . . "

"Don't you think I'd better come along and we'll talk it over on the spot, Knell?"

Littlejohn was starved through and this looked like going on for ever and ever.

"Would you, sir? I'd be very grateful."

A hand with a lamp and a froth of whiskers following appeared over the balusters of the stairs.

"What is it, Littlejohn? Anything wrong?"

"Yes, pazon. Finlo Crennell has been attacked again. And this time it's murder."

Before a look of sadness and alarm came to the parson's face, did Littlejohn see a gleam of adventure in the bright blue eyes?

## SATURDAY NIGHT

IT was six o'clock before the couple in Queen Street were left alone. First one visitor, then another called to welcome Finlo Crennell back. Finally, the lull between the day's work and the evening's leisure. Everyone at home, cleaning-up and getting ready for the week-end.

Outside, it was still raining. Fine rain, which hung in the air as it slowly fell. Little beads of moisture which, without being really fog, created a milky obscurity and clung to the clothes. The street lamps were surrounded by haloes and the sounds of the town grew muffled. There had been a succession of downpours on the three previous nights which had made Guy Fawkes celebrations out of the question. Dull, intermittent explosions sounded as the boys took advantage of the better weather.

Mrs. Cottier took a cloth from a drawer in the sideboard, spread it over the table, and began to lay the meal. Crennell was sitting placidly smoking in front of the blazing fire. He had brought a rocking-chair on the hearthrug, which had pleased Mrs. Cottier. It was his usual performance when he settled after dark and he had instinctively carried it out again. He rocked gently to and fro, puffing his pipe.

"How do you feel now, Finlo?"

He smiled, as usual, and then tried to utter a few words. The first real attempt at speech since he'd arrived.

Mrs. Cottier could not make out what he was saying, however. He hardly opened his mouth and seemed to eat his words as they came.

"What do you say?"

He nodded and smiled again.

"That's the first time you've tried to talk, Finlo. What do you want to say?"

He gabbled again, like a child learning to talk or imitating a grown-up.

"You'll soon be better. I'm just making your tea. I got some fluke . . . little dabs. You always liked them, didn't you?"

Another knock on the door and the doctor entered, muffled in a raincoat and wearing a slouch hat. Sandy hair and a sandy moustache on



which the fine rain hung in small globules. He took off his outdoor things. A young man who had taken over the practice of an old doctor who had retired.

"Well, Mr. Crennell. So, you're back with us. . . ."

No reply. Just the smile that wouldn't come off.

"He seems to have lost his memory, doctor, but he's just tried to talk for the first time. What is it? Has he been ill while he's been missin'?"

Dr. Jamieson made no reply, but took a chair and sat facing Crennell on the hearth.

"How are you feeling?"

A nod, a grunt, and another smile.

The doctor took out his stethoscope and stood up.

"Let's have a look at you, then. Stand up, Mr. Crennell and take off your jacket and waistcoat."

Crennell allowed himself to be manipulated, doing nothing much to help himself, good-humouredly letting the doctor and his housekeeper handle him. Jamieson put away his stethoscope.

"He's all right in himself. It's his brain. He's had a bad knock and it's quite possible there's some obstruction there which has taken his speech and made his wits a bit dim. I'll arrange to have him in hospital on Monday and they can decide there what's best. Meanwhile, he'll be all right. I think we'll soon have him better."

In reply to the woman's string of questions he gave general instructions about feeding, rest, and other things. He was baffled himself, but had to show a front of knowing. The police had told him all they knew and beyond that, there wasn't much in his clinical equipment that was of use.

He stood for a moment at the door. The soft, sad rain was still coming down. You couldn't see it falling, but you felt it. Like a mood of resignation.

The fog-horn was blaring at Langness and now and then a fusilade of fireworks.

"Good night, Mrs. Cottier. I'll call to-morrow and we'll have him in Noble's Hospital on Monday. Sure you can manage him?"

"Of course, doctor."

She closed the door. Footsteps started passing. People on their way to the pictures or the pubs.

They ate their tea in silence, nodding and smiling at one another. Now and then, Mrs. Cottier would refill Crennell's cup. He devoured the fish

with almost animal relish, his eyes on his plate. His appetite was voracious and Mrs. Cottier got up and put another lot on the grill and these he disposed of as well, eating the small bones and licking his fingers appreciatively. Finally, he had emptied every plate of food. Then he resumed his rocking-chair and his pipe.

She cleared the table and washed-up, returning now and then from the kitchen to see that he was all right. She found him rocking, silent, like one in deep thought. From time to time, he lifted his head and smiled again. A slow, satisfied smile, like one given to a new acquaintance who has done a kindness.

Finally, she hung the tea-cloth over the fireplace to dry, thought a moment, and then seemed to come to a decision.

"Would you like a bottle of beer, Finlo? I'll get you one."

She was a total abstainer, a Methodist, who in days past would have resented drink in the house. Crennell had gone his own way about it and taken his beer outside.

"If you'll stay good, I'll just call at the *Crown* for you and get a bottle or two. That be all right?"

No answer.

She put on her hat and coat.

"Just stay where you are, Finlo. Don't move. I'll be back in five minutes with your beer."

After another anxious glance she left him, locking the front door behind her and taking the key.

Crennell rocked and smoked for a minute or two and then raised his head with a puzzled look. Then he rose, put on his cap, and tried the door. His movements were those of a dog which has heard a call from his master which he tries to obey.

There was a spare key in the drawer of the sideboard and without hesitation he took it out, unlocked the door, and shambled into the dark.

He walked like one who knew his way about and where he was going. Down to the quayside and his favourite pub, the *Jolly Deemster*. But he did not make a bee-line. Instead, he wandered through a maze of little streets, looking to right and left as he did so, like one glad to be back and enjoying the feel of familiar haunts and the comfortable shadows of homely places.

From Queen Street the harbourmaster turned into the main square, where the avenues of trees made long shadows under the lights and the

great bulk of Rushen Castle loomed through the soft rain. Thence he moved in his wobbling way into a smaller square, dominated by a bank which formerly, in days when the town was the island capital, had been the House of Keys, the Manx parliament building. There he turned once to look at the tall fluted monument to a former governor which stood in the principal square facing the war memorial. It was as if Crennell were assuring himself that it was still there.

Along Quay Lane, a narrow alley leading down to the quayside. Here the mist was so thick that he couldn't see the opposite bank of the river. Not that he wished to see it. He made his way along the waterfront to a tall, threestoreyed house with a fine doorway and a façade of many windows, which stood near the harbour. Here he paused, rubbed his jaw, and seemed to ponder. It was the harbourmaster's house and office, which, until his retirement, Crennell had occupied. There his wife had died. He turned the corner and the harbour came in full view. A stretch of calm water enclosed by two piers like the arms of a pair of callipers. On the end of each, a dim navigation light shone through the mist of rain.

He stood there, evidently trying in his dim consciousness to sort things out. Like a dog which has been taken far from home and then returns and is puzzled by some change or other in familiar things. Something held Crennell back from knocking at the door of his old home. He shook his head, as though trying to clear it, and finally retraced his steps along the quay.

All the time he had been followed. Footsteps, soft, rhythmic, relentless, seemed to echo his own. He never once turned as though he heard them. As far as Crennell was concerned, they might not have existed at all. All the way from Queen Street, through the warren of old lanes to the quay and back. Sometimes the footsteps hastened as though anxious to shorten the distance between themselves and those of Finlo Crennell, and always something happened to slow them down to their persistent, slow pace again.

In Queen Street, a man and his wife on their way to visit relatives; in the square, a man in an old car, shunting it here and there, turning round to get out of the town. In front of the former House of Keys, an old woman going with an empty jug for her supper ale. Then, down Quay Lane, a courting couple, crushed close in a doorway, almost unconscious in a long kiss. And at the corner of the quay a man taking a dog for a walk. It was as though the people of Castletown were, in relays, protecting the stricken

harbourmaster from the fate which followed in his footsteps. And yet, in the blanket of thick, fine rain, nobody saw or greeted him. The man and his wife on their way to her mother's were quarrelling because he didn't want to go; the man manœuvring his car had a girl with him he didn't want anybody to see; the woman with the jug was anticipating her beer; the lovers were in a world of passionate ecstasy in spite of the weather; and the man with the dog was afraid he might lose her in the mist and she was precious to him. Had one of them looked up and seen Finlo Crennell, he would have been recognized and saved.

Then there was complete silence, as though the quiet town was expecting something. The lights of the streets seemed to illuminate a dead world. The empty telephone box near the castle gates, the police station with its pepper-pot towers silhouetted against the light of a fluorescent strip reflected on the castle walls, the single finger of the castle clock, given by Queen Elizabeth I, almost on nine.

The hotel at the corner where the quayside sloped down to the river bank was busy. The usual Saturday customers sitting round the bar enjoying their drinks. The blinds were drawn and the windows threw a soft glow across the river and into the narrow street in front. The sign was just visible. The *Jolly Deemster*, presumably in honour of some one-time jocular judge who had sat, in his time, at Castletown courthouse. The whole of the civic life was concentrated round the pub. The customs office, the castle, the harbour-board headquarters, the police station. Finlo Crennell walked right into the hub. He knew where he was going and made for the door of the hotel, the only living person on the scene.

The other footsteps sounded. It was as if they had been temporarily silent, smoothed over, like those of a ghost, and then they suddenly met the earth again.

"Finlo. . . . You know me don't you?"

The voice was soft, almost a whisper, but the harbourmaster turned and faced the figure which had materialized behind him. He rocked on his heels for a minute, peered at the speaker, and then smiled again. It was his answer to everything.

The shadow which had followed Crennell moved backwards four paces. Silence again, as though the town were still listening. Not a sound. Then a flash and a roar.

Finlo Crennell looked surprised. His knees sagged and on his puzzled face there slowly came the smile that wouldn't come off. It was his reaction to everything in the dim world which somebody had thrust upon him.

"Damn those kids. They ought to make it a law they can't let off fireworks except on the fifth. . . ."

Somebody in the *Jolly Deemster* said it as the clock over the castle struck nine and the footsteps outside hurried away.

The body lay sprawled over the edge of the pavement for a quarter of an hour or more and then a heavy man in a bowler hat and wearing a seaman's jersey under his jacket emerged in a hurry and unsteadily tottered round the side of the hotel. It wasn't until he returned to the street that he saw the body in the gutter.

"I thought he was drunk at first," he told the police later.

Then there started a sequence of events which didn't end until three o'clock in the morning.

The man in the billycock bent over the still form in the street and touched it. The light from the parlour of the *Jolly Deemster* fell across it and it was only when the sailor's wits had cleared that he saw the wound between the eyes and the trickle of blood flowing from it.

He couldn't get inside the *Jolly Deemster* fast enough.

"Finlo Crennell's outside and he's been shot."

For a split second it might have been a scene in a waxwork show.

The landlord and his wife behind the bar serving drinks, and a dozen or so Saturday evening customers sitting at little tables or on the long leather-upholstered seats round the walls. Men and their wives or girls. A group of workmen, stiff in their best Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, playing dominoes. A man with one eye who was telling the world in general about his grandfather who'd lived to be ninety-four.

". . . and he always drank a pint of boiling water first thing in the mornin' . . . ."

Then a shudder seemed to shake the room and everybody made for the door to see if the news was true.

"No need for everybody to come. The women'd better stop behind. And don't touch anythin'."

The man with one eye spoke this over his shoulder, ran to the body, looked at it, and without another word, dashed off to the police station round the corner. Thence, after raising the alarm, he tore off to The Crofts

to get a doctor. After this, he collapsed and had to be taken into a public house for a reviver.

Under its blanket of mist, the little town began to move. Doors opened and closed, more and more people appeared in the streets, a crowd gathered under the castle walls where the body of Finlo Crennell still lay in the gutter.

"A shot fired at point blank range straight through the brain. . . ."

The doctor was kneeling beside the body.

"There's nothing we can do. He's dead."

Two uniformed policemen who had arrived on the scene started to move away the crowd.

"Get along, now. You're doing no good out here in the rain, impedin' us with our work."

One of them had run out without his helmet in the excitement. They hadn't any intention of moving the body until they got instructions from higher up.

The sergeant-in-charge arrived with Mrs. Cottier. She'd called at the police station when she'd found Crennell missing on her return with the beer, and the sergeant had gone with her to look around and help.

When she saw the body on the pavement, Mrs. Cottier began to moan and weep.

"Better take her to her sister's. She won't do any good here."

Nobody wanted to leave the scene and the sergeant had to order one of the women who were now standing on the fringe of the crowd to take the housekeeper in charge.

"And the rest of ye, be off, an' do as you're told. You can't do any good here."

Everybody was listening and watching the doctor and the police. They seemed to have forgotten Finlo Crennell lying there in the rain, a smile still on his lips.

"Ring up Douglas and tell them there's been a murder here. Tell them to get along as soon as they can."

The bobby without a hat ran to the police station, and the other dispersed the crowd of onlookers with sweeping gestures. No sooner had one lot gone than another arrived.

The clock on Castle Rushen struck ten.

"He might have been lyin' there yet if I hadn't come out of the *Jolly Deemster*. . . ."

Everybody had forgotten the man with the bowler hat who'd first found Crennell.

"I thought he was drunk when I first put a sight on 'im, and then it came to me that somethin' was wrong."

The sergeant questioned him and gave it up as a bad job. The man in the bowler didn't know a thing about the murder. All he'd done was trip over the body.

At just before eleven, the flying squad arrived from Douglas. Photographers, fingerprint men, detectives, and an Inspector from the C.I.D., officially in charge and unofficially known as 'Nellie' because his name was Knell. A tall, thin, angular man, wearing a raincoat and a slouch hat with the brim turned down all round.

Half a dozen people started to tell Knell all about it right away.

"All right, all right . . . One at a time."

Photographs were taken and then the body was moved to the town morgue. The crowd dispersed and the police party turned in at the police station.

"He didn't get home till dusk. He'd been missin' for a while and finally Scotland Yard picked him up wanderin' in London. They sent an officer across with him and we thought it was safe to leave him at home with Mrs. Cottier. Who could have wanted to kill a harmless old man like Finlo Crennell? Why, he wouldn't hurt a fly. . . ."

The sergeant was angry about it. He and Crennell had been buddies when the ex-harbourmaster had been in office.

"Mrs. Cottier came here in great trouble just before nine. It seems Finlo had been quiet and well-behaved after the doctor left him, so she thought, as he was accustomed to havin' his glass of beer at night, she'd go and fetch him one. She locked the door when she went and when she got back, he'd opened it and wandered out. She came straight here and I went back with her. Somebody must have followed Finlo when he left home and killed him. But why? That's what I keep askin' myself. Why?"

Knell looked profound.

"That's what we've to find out. Now, the officer from Scotland Yard. Did he go back?"

He pondered.

"No. He couldn't, could he? There's no boat till Monday and all the 'planes are grounded on account of the fog."

"It was a senior man . . . Littlejohn . . . Chief Inspector Littlejohn. It seems he was sent on account of his knowing the Island. He's gone to stay with the Archdeacon at Grenaby for the night. . . . "

"Littlejohn!"

Knell leapt to his feet and rubbed his bony hands together.

"Littlejohn! What a stroke of luck! He's a great friend of mine. Ring up Grenaby right away. . . . Well? What are you waiting for? Get Littlejohn on the 'phone for me."

Knell was so delighted at the news that he forgot that he was on a murder case and performed a little step-dance with excitement and glee.



## SUNDAY MORNING

IT was one o'clock when Littlejohn arrived at Castletown police station in the official car they'd sent to Grenaby for him. Only with difficulty did he manage to persuade his venerable friend the Archdeacon to stay at home on account of the bad night and the full day's work of the Sunday.

The thin rain still hung over everything and fell in large drops from the trees. It gave the sounds of the night a smothered tone; the foghorn, the loud bellowing of a cow, and the bark of a dog as the car passed a farm, all sounded to be coming from under a blanket. The police car was warm and comfortable, for the driver in honour of his distinguished companion, had switched on all the gadgets. Heater, de-mister, de-froster, fog-lamp, special windscreen wipers. All going full blast.

"You quite comfortable, sir?"

In spite of the cosy vehicle, the smell of the damp air penetrated. Dead leaves, wet earth, and the faint scent of mushrooms.

The little police station at Castletown was like a power-station functioning smoothly whilst everyone outside slept. Not a soul about in the streets, or the harbour, or the waterfront. The silhouette of the huge castle seemed to stand guard over the sleeping town. Odd street lamps shone through the mist, there was a light in one of the banks to enable the constable on the beat to see if the safe was intact, and a window in a front room of the hotel in the square was illuminated. The occupant had just wakened from a bad dream and had switched on to reassure himself. That was all.

"After all, it's as much your case as ours, isn't it, sir? You were a sort of bodyguard for him, weren't you?"

Detective Inspector Knell was convincing Littlejohn beforehand that he ought to stay and see the case through. Knell was so delighted at finding himself again on an inquiry with Littlejohn, that his usually lugubrious face shone with pleasure and well-being.

This was the first case of any importance that Knell had been engaged on since his promotion to Inspector. The Superintendent had told him to get

on with it until they could arrange with Scotland Yard for Littlejohn to assist.

"It'll be like old times to serve under you again, sir."

Littlejohn felt the same. He'd always been fond of Knell. A polite and proper young officer who didn't pretend he knew everything.

"Did you find out the name of the boat that left Castletown the night Finlo Crennell vanished?"

"Yes, sir. It was a timber boat from Amsterdam. The *Rijswijk*."

Knell read the name from his notebook and he looked to be chewing gum as he pronounced it.

"She went out on the night tide in ballast, calling for a cargo in London. We get a few of them coming here. A small boat."

Littlejohn slowly filled and lit his pipe.

"Crennell left here on October 28th and turned up in London on November 5th. Eight days. . . ."

He picked up the telephone on the desk and asked for Scotland Yard.

"Littlejohn here. Any news yet about boats in the port of London from the Isle of Man on the night Finlo Crennell was found in Whitechapel. . . ? Yes, Crennell, Superintendent Jenks' case. You might ask about the *Rijswijk*, R-I-J-S-W-I-J-K. Got it? When did she get in, where was she from, and where did she go to? Let me know as soon as you can, thanks. . . ."

There were four of them in the police station. Littlejohn, Knell, the sergeant in charge, and a constable. Lights shone out from the windows and came to a dead end in the mist. The weather seemed to paralyse everything. Nothing to search the streets for, nobody to question, no clue to follow. Just a blank from the start.

The police surgeon hadn't performed an autopsy. The bullet had passed right through the skull and out, and might have been fired from an army automatic.

"Whoever did it wasn't going to make a mistake the second time."

The doctor was the first to suggest in actual words that Crennell's first accident had been a put-up job.

The four men in the police station were quiet. The mood of the small hours and the weather outside had fallen on them. Now and then the constable yawned. The sergeant was busy making a report. On the table, four cups drained to the dregs of tea. Littlejohn after his two days of travel with Finlo Crennell, felt like falling asleep as he sat there. His eyes

wandered to Knell's face. Marriage seemed to suit him. He looked happier and was putting on weight. His cheeks were fuller.

The telephone made them all jump.

Scotland Yard had been quick on the job.

The *Rijswijk* had arrived in London on October 30th, taken general cargo aboard, and left for her home port on November 3rd.

Littlejohn raised his eyebrows.

"Didn't they report picking-up Crennell at Castletown? You'd better inquire from the dock police then. And get the district stations to go the rounds of the dockside pubs and lodging-houses to see if anybody answering to Crennell's description stayed there between October 30th and the fifth of November, when our men found him rambling around Whitechapel. It might be worth a call to Amsterdam to ask the master of the *Rijswijk* why he didn't report about his passenger. Let us know first thing in the morning, if you can. . . ."

Littlejohn stood for a minute with his hands in his pockets, his pipe in the corner of his mouth. The rest watched him, waiting for a verdict of some kind. There was nothing much to be said. A smiling harbourmaster, a blow on the head, a shot in the night, and the captain of a Dutch timber boat who hadn't reported picking up an unconscious man and taking him all the way to London and there presumably losing him. . . .

It was going to be a complicated case by the looks of it.

Things didn't work in this quiet little town as they did at Scotland Yard. No midnight autopsy; Finlo Crennell would have to rest in the morgue until the doctor had time for him. No flying-squad spreading out the net right away and bringing in a motley assortment of the dead man's friends and associates; they could wait until to-morrow. They couldn't get far; no 'planes on account of the weather, no packet boat until Monday morning.

"I think we'll call it a day."

Knell drove Littlejohn back to Grenaby. As they entered the car he sniffed the air.

"It should clear by morning. There's a bit of a wind already. You can tell by the way the foghorn doesn't sound as plain."

All Littlejohn felt he needed was a good night's sleep and he wasn't going to get one. It was three o'clock already.

"Did you know Crennell well, Knell?"

"Moderately. I did a spell in Castletown as a constable. He was harbourmaster then and we met quite a lot. Always a nice sort of chap. Harmless. Did his work well and never made an enemy. I can't understand why all this bad luck has come to him just at a time when he ought to have been enjoying retirement. . . ."

Past a farm with lights showing in the cowshed, and then the cry of a cow in calf.

". . . I could do with your help, sir. Think they'll let you stay?"

Littlejohn smiled to himself. Good old Knell! Never afraid to admit his limitations.

"I daresay it'll be all right if the usual formalities are arranged. Scotland Yard is interested in Crennell, after all. I think we can fix it."

They ran downhill and over the bridge at Grenaby. The mist hung over the river, which swished between the stone piers. Then quietness. All the windows of the cottages dark, just the fanlight of the parsonage throwing out a thin beam.

"Drop me this side of the gate, Knell. We don't want to wake the parson. Good night. See you first thing in the morning."

"Good night, chief. I'll call for you around ten."

Chief! Knell had given Littlejohn the top job in the investigation already!

The car whined slowly back up the hill and quietness descended again. Littlejohn stood at the gate for a minute and listened to the melancholy drip of rain from the old trees. Funny the effect this place had upon him. His duties had taken him all over the world, but Grenaby always seemed to be waiting for him, as though he'd been there before and wanted to get back.

The dead leaves rustled under his feet as he made his way to the door. They had given him a key, but Maggie Keggin was waiting for him with some sandwiches and coffee.

"Master Kinrade would have stopped up for ye, sir, but I packed him off with a sleepin' tablet. To-morrow's his busy day. Come to think of it, it's Sunday now."

Littlejohn awoke at eight in the morning, had a bath, and started to shave himself. He hung his shaving mirror to the fastener of the window because the light was poor. He had slept well and spent a long time in the

hot water. The clock in the hall struck nine as he wiped the lather from his face.

Knell had been right. The weather had changed. The rain had gone, there was a breeze blowing, and it was colder. Through the window Littlejohn could see the road. The surrounding trees were gaunt and leafless and let in a thin wintry light. The sky was blue and looked as if it had been shampooed. High white clouds scurried across it and hung over the sweeping hills visible through the bare branches.

A land-girl drew up in a milkcart drawn by a stocky little horse, and Maggie Keggin sent her back for another bottle of milk because they had 'company' at the vicarage. Along the road a group of children dawdled to morning Sunday school.

Archdeacon Kinrade was eating a good meal of ham and eggs when Littlejohn joined him.

"Morning, Inspector. What news after your night's work?"

"None, sir. But Knell is calling for me at ten. I'm sorry I'll have to miss your sermon this morning."

Maggie Keggin gave him a black look.

"Workin' on Sunday! No good'll come of it . . . . "

She was dressed in her best black.

"Did you happen to know much about Finlo Crennell, parson? He's said to have been a decent chap without enemies, but someone must have wanted him out of the way badly. . . ."

The Archdeacon laid down his knife and fork.

"I've known him for more than forty years and always found him a very nice fellow. I've known him even better since he gave up the sea and settled to his job in Castletown. He lost his wife about ten years ago. I must confess they didn't get on very well together. She nagged him a lot and he was heard more than once wishing he'd never left the sea. Still, that hasn't anything to do with this case. . . ."

"Any children?"

"No. Two nephews, I think. One in Canada and the other in Castletown, a linesman on the telephones. A decent man."

"Much money?"

"I don't think so. He'd his pension, of course, but I never heard he'd much more beside. Mrs. Cottier is a distant relative and has kept house for

him since his wife died. What Crennell did in his spare time, I don't know. Probably just hung around the port and gossiped. . . ."

Parson Kinrade looked Littlejohn earnestly in the eyes.

"You'll be staying to see this thing through, Littlejohn?"

"I suppose so, sir. Knell is on the case and he seems to want it. He's probably got it all fixed up already. . . ."

The complete answer drew up at the gate in the shape of a police car from which Knell stepped and jauntily walked up the path from the gate. It was obvious he had already settled it all.

"Is the chief in?"

Maggie Keggin, annoyed by his furious assault on the bell, met him sternly on the doorstep.

"Who?"

"The Chief Inspector. . . ."

"Why don't you call him by his proper name, then? And what's all this about taking him to work on Sunday?"

"Come in, Knell. Come in."

The parson's voice put an end to the ordeal.

"Had your breakfast?"

Knell rubbed his bony hands.

"Yes, sir. Good and early."

"That's good, because there isn't any left!"

Mrs. Keggin fired the parting shot as she closed the door.

Knell couldn't hold his news.

"It's all fixed up, sir. Scotland Yard told the Chief Constable they'd be much obliged if you'd stay and see the end of the Crennell case. . . ."

"Much obliged, eh? That's a new one!"

"Well, words to that effect, sir."

He paused and took out his notebook for refreshment.

"There's also one or two items of information from the Yard, chief. They're busy combing the likely places where Crennell might have dossed after he left the boat."

The parson raised his eyebrows.

"Dossed? I don't remember teaching you that word when I gave you lessons in English, Reggie?"

"Nautical word for lodging or sleepin', sir. In common use among sailors. But there's more serious news from Amsterdam, sir. London rang up

the Dutch police. The *Rijswijk* reached Amsterdam on November 5th, in the afternoon. The same night Captain Leeuwens, the master, was found drowned in the river with a nasty blow on the head. So there'll be no explanations about Mr. Crennell from him. . . . "

They had to explain to the impatient vicar what it was all about.

"It *would* have to happen on Sunday," was the reply.

Everything was more cheerful on the way back to Castletown. As though a melancholy blanket had been lifted from everything. November sunshine, people chatting and cheerful on their way to church, farmers busy getting done for their afternoon's relaxation, cars on the roads and off for the day already.

To look at Castletown, you'd think the last thing to happen there was murder. The Parade in front of the church was alive with churchgoing, idlers smoking at the corner of Arbory Street, milkcarts and newsboys busy on their rounds, and the town band climbing in a charabanc, their instruments bright, off to distant parts to play at a memorial service.

Last night's dismal happenings might have been a sordid nightmare dispelled when the fog lifted.

In the middle of a knot of loungers, the man who had found the body outside the *Jolly Deemster* was telling the rest all about it. Whenever a new-comer arrived, he started all over again.

"It was like this. . . . If I hadn't . . ."

"Here we are."

Knell sounded eager to be getting on with the job.

The neat little police station and the decent squad of local police. A fresh lot of men on duty this morning.

"Nobody to relieve *us*, eh chief?"

Knell's spirits were rising.

"Where do we start?"

"I don't know."

Littlejohn really didn't know. Sunday was almost as bad as the fog. Everything shut up, everybody in their Sunday best, and an atmosphere of sanctimoniousness which put paid to any real start.

"No good'll come of it," Mrs. Keggins had said, and it looked as if she was right.

Two murders now. Crennell and Leeuwens, and the Dutchman killed in the way somebody had originally tried on the Manxman. The second crime

was the business of the Dutch police, but what they discovered might profoundly influence the Crennell affair.

"Where could we find Mrs. Cottier, Knell? She won't have spent the night alone in Queen Street, will she?"

"No, sir. She went to stay with her sister, Mrs. Christian. She lives on the promenade."

They crossed the lesser swing bridge. More idlers standing on the quayside, watching the swans and gulls which children were feeding. Everybody seemed to be celebrating the disappearance of the mist by taking an airing.

A pleasant Sunday morning. Littlejohn realized that this was one of the places he had neglected during his past visits to the Isle of Man. Well, he looked like getting plenty of it now!

They passed between groups of tall old houses, once opulent dwellings, now used for anything from offices to salesrooms and warehouses. Now and then, down alleys adjoining the property, the sea came in view.

Finally, they reached the promenade, a long curving road which, with a few turns inland and interruptions by buildings, stretched right out to Fort Island on the long Langness peninsula. To the left, King William's College surrounded by playing fields. Boys from the school taking walks along the shore or making their way to chapel.

Where the promenade first faced the sea, a row of about a dozen small houses, each with a porch to protect it from the full blast of rough weather. The kind of property which sells well for summer cottages, little *pieds à terre* for weekends and holidays.

"I've got the address."

Knell took another look in his pocket-book.

"*Chanteclair*. . . . That's the name."

Littlejohn raised his eyebrows.

"Mrs. Christian didn't call it that. It was the previous owner. He was a writer of books and ran away with a schoolgirl. Caused quite a scandal, I can tell you."

The tide had gone out, leaving a wide expanse of sand and seaweed. There was a strong smell of iodine on the air.

"This is it."

A green door with a brass knocker. Small windows freshly painted green, as well. Knell beat with the knocker and the door flew open as



though they'd been expected.

"Well?"

Mrs. Christian was almost twice the size of her sister. A huge, powerful woman with large hands and a foghorn of a voice. She had been a schoolmistress at a village school and treated everybody as though they needed discipline.

"Is Mrs. Cottier at home, Mrs. Christian?"

"Yes, and she doesn't wish to be disturbed. Besides, it's Sunday."

Mrs. Christian was all in black, too, including stockings. A large gold locket at her throat, from which gazed the pale eyes and whiskered cheeks of her husband, the late Caleb Christian, dead for thirty years, and in his picture looking already far gone.

"It's important, Mrs. Christian. This is Chief Inspector Littlejohn, of Scotland Yard, who was a friend of Mr. Crennell and who's undertaken the case of his murder."

Knell was like a schoolboy himself, excusing his misdemeanours to his teacher!

"Come in, then, the two of you, but I won't have my sister bothered. She's had enough, as it is."

Mrs. Christian must have lived in a larger house before she retired. The living-room looked as if she'd squeezed all she had in the way of furniture into it by hook or crook. You could hardly turn round. There was even a piano as well as a harmonium, a large sideboard, and more chairs than you could take in at one glance.

Mrs. Cottier was sitting before the fire, fully dressed in black, as well, stockings, too. She had a dazed look, and as she rose she looked even smaller than normal on account of her sister's size. They were alike somehow, but the small one made you think that some head-hunter or other had used his powers of shrinkage on her sister, screwed her down to half the size, and made a Mrs. Cottier of her. She nodded to Knell and then saw Littlejohn.

"Good mornin', sir. My sister says you're goin' to find out who killed Finlo. I hope you do find him and make 'im suffer."

Suddenly she gnashed her teeth with rage at the thought of the murderer's suffering. She must have been a little terror when her temper was roused!

"We won't trouble you much, Mrs. Cottier. . . ."

Mrs. Christian was going to have them settled for a real interview now that they were there.

"Sit down, both of you. No, not there. You'll smash it up, a big man like you. Take the big chair."

Littlejohn hung poised over a small dining-chair for a moment, and then moved over to a large basket chair which creaked and groaned as he lowered himself.

"We just wished to know if Mr. Crennell's behaviour had been in any way strange before his disappearance?"

"In what way, sir?"

"How did he spend his time in his retirement?"

"They oughtn't to have made him retire when he did. He was took up with his work and when he gave it up, he was lost. He used to keep goin' down to the harbour and the quay watchin' in the boats and envyin' the new harbourmaster his job. He often said so. He used to be in charge of Derbyhaven, too. That's just along the coast. He'd walk out there as well, two or three times a week, just like he did when he had the job."

Littlejohn looked out through the small window on the stretch of cold bay, with the long spit of Langness sweeping out to sea. A lighthouse, a large hotel, and a ruined oratory. Beyond them, the channel. White crests on the waves and, far out, a large ship going south and, from where he was watching, apparently sailing over the land.

"He liked his work and he liked people. It was a shame when he had to retire."

"But was he strange in any way before his disappearance? I mean, did you get the impression that he was afraid of anything, interested in anything, dealing with queer people?"

"I never heard of such a thing. Of course not."

Mrs. Cottier's mouth shrivelled into a thin line. She imagined that, somehow, Finlo Crennell's character was being blackened.

"Did Mr. Crennell leave a will?"

Mrs. Cottier dried up and gave Littlejohn a funny look. She thought Crennell's personal affairs were no business of anybody except the family.

"I don't see how his private business comes into it."

Mrs. Christian did, however. Besides, now was the time to appease her insatiable curiosity.

"Don't be so silly, Alice. Of course it's his business. Suppose Finlo left his money to somebody and they did away with him to get it?"

It was obvious the thought had never entered Mrs. Cottier's head, and now it struck her with terror.

"Don't speak about it. It's horrible. Of course, they wouldn't. . . . Who?"

"Look here, Alice. You'd better tell the Inspector if there was a will. It's the police asking you, not the first gossip you meet in the town. You'd better tell him."

Mrs. Cottier gulped.

"There was a will. He'd saved a bit. About a thousand pounds, and he owned the house. He left the house to me. The rest . . ."

And with that, Mrs. Cottier started to weep and moan.

"It's not fair to leave all the worry of it to me. There's the funeral. How am I to arrange that? It's all left to me, and I'd no sooner got up this morning, than Wilfred was here, askin' how the money 'ad been left, and sayin' that him and his family wouldn't come to the funeral if any of the others was there."

Knell's face was a picture. He looked at Mrs. Cottier as if she'd gone mad.

Littlejohn took out his pipe, asking if he might smoke, and slowly filled it.

"Now, Mrs. Cottier, suppose you tell us what all the worry is about. In the first place, who's Wilfred?"

Mrs. Christian didn't wait to be asked. Her booming voice filled the room.

"He's Finlo's nephew. Wilfred Crennell. He lives in the town and his father . . . his late father . . . was Finlo's brother. Wilfred's father was in a nice way as a grocer, and left a tidy sum between Wilfred and his brother, Leonard, who's in Canada. In addition to which, Wilfred has a good job. What does *he* want with Finlo's money, and who's he to set himself up against *anybody*. If him and his don't attend the funeral, good riddance, that's what I say."

"My sister doesn't like Wilfred's wife," explained Mrs. Cottier, mildly.

"Who does she think she is?"

Littlejohn struggled to get a word in edgeways.

"And why won't Wilfred come to the funeral? And who are *the others* you speak of?"

Mrs. Cottier was embarrassed, but her sister suffered no such reticence. Her voice boomed like a foghorn.

"The others she speaks of are Nancy Cribbin and her family. You might as well know. Finlo Crennell's wife couldn't have any children. So Finlo had a daughter by her younger sister. That child was Nancy Cribbin. . . ."

Mrs. Cottier uttered a cry of alarm and Knell, who had been balancing a little glass globe in which a snowstorm took place when you shook it, let the thing slip from his fingers and just managed to rescue it in mid-air.

"What are you screechin' about, Alice? Men are men the world over, and if you were to ask questions from a lot of people you think respectable, you'd get a big surprise."

And with that, she uncorked a bottle labelled *The Mixture*, which stood on the mantelpiece and looked like gin, took a tablespoonful, and hiccoughed.

## THE OTHER WOMAN

QUESTION after question. Gently put and with tact, to prevent Mrs. Cottier shying off again.

From previous experience of Littlejohn, Knell knew that he bothered little about fingerprints, clues, alibis and scientific tricks. His line of attack was a patient, careful building-up of background and atmosphere, piece by piece like a jigsaw, until the last bit slipped into place and the case was done.

And now, Finlo Crennell, one time harbourmaster of Castletown, was coming slowly to life again. His home, his habits, his daily routine, and the relentless unfolding of his past.

"His wife has been dead ten years?"

"Yes. A long illness and I went to keep house for them and I stayed on with Finlo after. I'm a widow, too. My husband was lost at sea. He was Finlo's first cousin."

Littlejohn was standing watching the road which ran from Castletown to Derbyhaven, as though, any time, Finlo Crennell might come wobbling along in his usual way, taking his routine walk from one place to the other. Men pushing perambulators or giving young children an airing whilst the women cooked the dinner. Dogs playing on the beach. Boys from King William's College taking a stroll. The kind of people Crennell met.

"And Nancy. . . . Tell me about her."

A pause. Then:

"It happened a long time since. Nancy's twenty-four now and has a husband and three children. It was when Finlo was at sea. His wife was a Gawne. Ethel Gawne. Her and her sister, Mary, lived together, their parents havin' died. Ethel was the one with the brains and useful fingers. Mary was a bit flighty. . . ."

The account was becoming too long-winded for Mrs. Christian.

"To cut a long story short, when Finlo married Ethel, they took Mary to live with them. It seemed the best way. Finlo at sea . . ."

"A sort of *menage à trois*, eh?" said Knell, whose wife was a teacher and made him read highbrow novels.

"What does he say? Some nasty French joke, I'll be bound. Well, you needn't be rude about it."

Knell turned a dull red and shook the little globe until it snowed a blizzard.

"Finlo and Ethel had no children and then, one time after he'd been home . . . well . . . it soon became obvious what had happened between him and Mary. You can go on from there, Alice."

Having thus skated over the dangerous ice, Mrs. Christian handed over to her sister again.

"Ethel was upset, but she took it very Christian-like. The child was born, a little girl, and she let Mary and the baby, little Nancy, live with her still. I don't know what went on between Ethel and Finlo, but they hardly ever spoke much to one another after that. Just lived on together under a cloud till Ethel died."

"You've missed what happened to Mary. Tell them."

"She ran away with a commercial traveller to the mainland and left the child. It would be about two when she ran away. Yes, just about two years old, Nancy was. . . ."

Littlejohn turned.

"Was she ever seen again?"

"Oh, yes. Just after the war ended. Her and her husband, a man called Tramper, came over on holiday. They'd risen in the world. Stayed at a first-class hotel in Douglas. Came to see Finlo, bold as brass, in a car. She was pretty when she was young . . . very pretty. Blue eyes, golden 'air, and the loveliest complexion. . . ."

She trailed away.

"Go on. They don't want to know how good-looking she was. She was a bit full-blown last time she was over. She'd gone fat and common. Her husband was a common man, I always said so."

Mrs. Christian thereupon dried up again. It was like a treble and contralto duet.

"Where do they live, Mrs. Christian?"

"Liverpool, I think. And I'd like to know where they get their money from."

"Oh, he's honest enough. They keep a shop of some sort in a good-class part. . . ."

"So you say. I don't trust him."

"Did they inquire about Nancy, Mrs. Cottier?"

"Not as far as I know. I don't know really why they came, except to flaunt themselves. She had an expensive fur coat on although it was midsummer."

"And Nancy. . . . She married. Who did she marry?"

"He was a farmer from these parts. Worked on his father's farm. They moved after the war. Out at Druidale, they are now, hill-farmin', I hear."

Knell sat upright.

"Oh, it's that Cribbin, is it? Charlie Cribbin. I don't think so much of Charlie. He's a bit of a dark horse himself."

Mrs. Christian sat upright, too. Her medicine had flushed her cheeks a bit.

"And what's wrong with Charlie Cribbin, might I ask? Tryin' to give a dog a bad name and hang him? What's he done wrong? Tell me that."

For answer, Knell looked wise but said nothing.

"And Finlo Crennell has left his ready money to his daughter?"

"Illegitimate to be exact," corrected Mrs. Christian.

"Yes," said Mrs. Cottier. "He was always fond of 'er. Used to go up to Druidale now and then, leck, to put a sight on her and see his grandchilder. They were his own flesh and blood, don't forget. After all this time and 'im bein' so alone, I didn't blame him. Would you?"

"He'd no right to flaunt his wrong-doing, and you know it, Alice."

"All right. He's dead, Lucy. Let him rest."

There was a good smell of cooking beef on the air and Mrs. Christian left them for a minute to see that the joint in the stove in the kitchen was coming along all right. They could hear her opening the door of the gas-stove and banging it to again. Until she returned, nothing more was said.

Littlejohn knocked out his pipe against the bars of the fire and put it in his pocket.

"Would you have any objection to our looking over Mr. Crennell's house, Mrs. Cottier? It might save you a journey if you lent us the key."

She hesitated, turning over in her mind whether or not she had left it quite tidy when she locked it in the early hours of that day.

"Yes. . . . I'll get the key."

She went upstairs and returned with the imitation crocodile-skin bag, took the key and handed it to Littlejohn.

Service was over as the two detectives returned to the town. Knots of people standing about gossiping, others taking a short stroll along the waterfront before lunch.

Knell, leading the way, crossed the swing bridge again and took Littlejohn along the quayside to the harbour. Groups of men festooned along the frontage eyed the pair of them curiously. News had travelled round that a famous detective from 'over' was already on the job.

"That's the harbourmaster's house and office."

A large, handsome building with a dozen or more windows on the front and a fine Georgian portico and door. A sign with the three legs and *Isle of Man Harbour Board*. A tall erection like a drainpipe rising from the roof and a seagull balanced on it and looking down on them.

Along the waterside, up Quay Lane, and to a little square, with more fine old houses and a stone rocket-station, like a little chapel, with a green door. Parliament Lane. Just like a tiny metropolis. The church and the Parade in front of it and the last gossips having their after-service chat. Queen Street. Littlejohn found the house, unlocked the door, and they entered.

The dark lobby again, with the living-room to the right and the kitchen at the end. The two men turned-in at the first door. It was already familiar to Littlejohn. A dead fire, the sideboard, the two arm chairs, the rocking-chair and the table, now covered with a plush cloth. Over the mantelpiece a framed wedding-group. The Chief Inspector vaguely recognized Crennell, serious this time, by the side of his bride, who wore a large merry-widow hat. Crennell was in ordinary clothes, looking awkward. His bride was about an inch taller than he was; slim, tightly waisted, flat-chested, with dark hair and eyes and thin lips. A plain, homely sort.

There were two others in the picture; a bridesmaid and the best-man. The least said the better about the latter. He looked as if they'd forced him to dress-up for the occasion; ill-fitting clothes, large unkempt moustache, enormous fisherman's hands, a tense look on his face, waiting for the exposure to end. Afraid of the camera and as stiff as a ramrod.

The bridesmaid was different.

"That must be Mary, the one who Finlo . . . . who Finlo . . . ." said Knell, breathing hard down Littlejohn's neck and searching for the right



word.

"Seduced?" said Littlejohn with a smile, and Knell blushed heavily.

Mary was the life and soul of the picture. Fair, vivacious, smiling, quite at home before a camera. It made you wonder why her sister had beaten her in the marriage market. Mary even made the hideous hat and its outrageous feather look chic. And though the wedding dresses of the time left a lot to the imagination, Mary showed herself plump and tempting against her sister's flat-chested austerity.

"It was asking for it, letting that one come to live with the married couple," muttered Knell, as if to himself.

The drawers of the chest which was used as a sideboard were full of linen and what looked like the best cutlery. Nothing of any importance.

The kitchen was as clean as a new pin. Red tiles on the floor, a gas-stove, a table with a scrubbed white top, a china cupboard and a larder. Bright aluminium pans on hooks. . . .

Littlejohn looked through the window. A low wall, and beyond it, shingle, the tideline, and then the sea, and a wide view of Castletown Bay. Outdoor sanitation, the Manx *thie beg*, the little house. . . . A small garden, too, in which Crennell must have spent a bit of time. Bedraggled michaelmas daisies, marigolds, dahlias, lobelia. Dead or dying plants which, had Finlo Crennell lived his normal life of late, would probably have been cleared out and the little beds turned over and left neat for the winter. Instead . . .

They climbed the stairs which went up from the hall, covered by a strip of red carpet held in place by bright brass rods, to a small landing. Two bedrooms, the one at the back and overlooking the sea obviously Crennell's.

Everywhere the polished tidiness of a good housekeeper. Everything neat and in its place.

Crennell's room was simple, even austere. Carpet on the floor, a single iron bed, a chair, a wardrobe, and a mahogany tallboy. In one corner a seaman's chest. An even finer view of the bay from the window.

There was a brass ship's chronometer on the wall, still going and marking half an hour after noon. A brass telescope on the window-sill, whence Crennell must have watched the passing ships. A sextant and a peaked officer's cap hanging on the back of the bedroom door.

The mahogany chest contained Crennell's linen, ties and underwear. You could even see there the meticulous care of Mrs. Cottier. Two of each!

All neatly folded and put away. The same in the wardrobe. A uniform suit with brass buttons and a poorer suit of civilian wear, tweed and little worn. Then a black funeral suit smelling of mothballs.

The seaman's chest was unlocked. Littlejohn raised the lid. Books on navigation, binoculars, tobacco tins, pipes, a hotch-potch of souvenirs of all sorts picked up in a sailor's travels. A small revolver and some cartridges. The weapon had been cleaned, oiled, and laid away.

Littlejohn felt a faint twinge of excitement as he turned over the contents, one by one. But there was nothing to get excited about. Crennell had obviously not been a hoarder. No letters, no diaries, not even a receipted bill. Just the ordinary papers which mark the milestones of an uneventful life.

A copy of Crennell's birth registration at Arbory Church. The marriage-lines of his wife. His certificates as second and third mate. His wife's death-certificate. *Pneumonia and Heart Failure*. A deed concerning the grave of his wife at Malew church. The birth certificate of Nancy Gawne. Even that! The illegitimate child had taken her mother's surname, of course. Then an out-of-date passport and a lot of photographs. Strangely enough, the pictures were not family groups, but of boats, nautical parties, many in foreign parts.

Knell watched over Littlejohn's shoulder as the Chief Inspector slowly examined the photographs.

"That looks like Mr. Morrison," he said pointing to a half-plate print, obviously made by someone who knew how to do a good job.

Littlejohn recognized the harbour at Cannes. A mass of masts like lances, rising from the hundred ships moored there. The familiar quayside opposite the Square Reynaldo Hahn. And standing, smiling in front of a sleek and expensive yacht, Finlo Crennell in officer's uniform, a fellow officer similarly dressed, another sailor, and then a huge man in a reefer coat and yachting cap.

"It looks as if Crennell was employed at some time by Mr. Morrison and that was taken on a trip somewhere."

"Who's Morrison?"

"He lives in Castletown in a big old house along Malew Street. A rich man who used to own boats here till he retired. I believe he once had his own yacht, but I didn't know that Crennell ever worked for him."

Littlejohn slipped the photograph in his pocket.

There was a copy of a will, too, bearing the name of the lawyer who had drawn up the original, which was probably in his office now.

*I, Finlo Crennell, retired Harbourmaster, of Castletown,  
Malew, in the Isle of Man.*

*My house and contents to Alice Cottier. . . .*

*My boat, the Maggie, to Simon Collister. . . .*

*My sextant and books of navigation to the Manx Museum. . . .*

*The residue to Nancy Cribbin, born Gawne. . . .*

"Who's Simon Collister, Knell?"

"I don't know, sir, but we can ask at the police station."

More official papers, but nothing else. Littlejohn closed the box.

"Crennell wasn't a man for hoarding trifles, was he?"

They took a final look round. A neat, peaceful room, with a view of the sea which needed a lot of beating. Plain cream paper on the wall and all kinds of souvenirs, plaques, ornamental gourds, photographs of foreign towns, groups of men in naval dress, fastened to the walls with tacks. In one corner, a wash-basin and a ewer filled with water, and soap and a towel. . . .

Littlejohn glanced through the window in passing. The man next door was in his back-yard looking from one window of Crennell's house to another, trying to spot what was going on inside.

They barely looked at Mrs. Cottier's room, which was on the front and as neat as the rest. Over the fireplace, another wedding group. A much younger and plumper Mrs. Cottier with a retinue of groom, bridesmaid, and groomsman. The late Cottier was tall, thin, sad-eyed and had a heavy moustache and beard. Finlo Crennell was in the picture as best man. Both men wore naval uniform.

Out in the street a knot of people had gathered, talking and watching the house, anxious to know what the police were doing.

Finally, the two detectives went downstairs again. The dividing walls between the houses of the row must have been thin. They could hear noises next door. Voices, and people tramping about.

Littlejohn locked the door and pocketed the key. The men who had been watching the house broke into small knots and strolled away a bit self-consciously. One of them, tall, heavy and ruddy-cheeked, hesitated and then approached Littlejohn.

He wore a blue suit of a nautical cut, double-breasted, with wide-bottomed trousers, and a jersey instead of a waistcoat. He touched his cloth

cap with a forefinger.

"You the special detective from across, sir?"

The other groups of men halted and looked on. It was obvious that the big man had been telling them he would ask the police what they were doing. Now, faced with the fulfilment of his threat, he was having to see it through. He was diffident about it.

"Yes. Do you want me?"

The man gulped and his large Adam's-apple rose and fell.

"I just wanted to say that Finlo Crennell was a big friend of mine, sir. He wouldn't hurt a fly, sir. Everybody wants you to ketch and see hung the man who did this to 'im."

Littlejohn nodded.

"Your name is?"

"Collister, sir. I live along the street here. Finlo and me was friends. I was at sea with 'im once. We used to sail his boat, the *Maggie*, together."

Littlejohn didn't tell Collister that his friend had left him the *Maggie* for his own.

"Have you any idea who could have done this, Mr. Collister?"

"I don't know, sir. But if there's anythin' I can do . . ."

"Thank you, Mr. Collister. I'll remember. . . ."

They went along the street back to the Parade again. Most of the doors were open and emitted the good smells of Sunday's dinner. Curtains moved as they passed and eyes followed their progress. A murder in Castletown was unheard of and was everybody's business. A group of cyclists passing along on their ways to the coast round Scarlett Point, turned and curiously eyed the two policemen. The news had travelled fast and far. Everybody was on the look-out.

At the police station, more news had come in from Scotland Yard.

The Amsterdam police had telephoned another report about the *Rijswijk* affair. Van Dam, the mate of the vessel, had been arrested and charged with the murder of Captain Leeuwens. The police had searched the ship in the course of their inquiries and, beneath a loose board under Van Dam's bunk, had found a wallet in a waterproof bag. With the wallet, a bulging packet containing a thousand pounds in Bank of England notes. The money had obviously been in water and the notes had been dried. No other papers in the wallet, but written in ink under the flap of the note-case

could be faintly read the name of the owner. *Finlo Crennell. Castletown. Isle of Man.*

The Dutch police held the theory that Crennell had been picked up by the skipper of the *Rijswijk* from the harbour at Castletown. His unconscious body had been searched and the money taken by the captain, probably with the knowledge of the mate. Perhaps Leeuwens had held the notes in safe-keeping till Crennell recovered. Van Dam knowing of it, either stole or fought for the money with the captain, and killed him. He was being questioned. . . .

So, there *had* been some jiggery-pokery connected with Crennell's death!

What was he doing with a large bundle of notes totalling a thousand pounds? How had he earned them? Who had handed them over to him?

Knell and his colleagues in uniform looked completely abashed. They were in deep waters with a vengeance.

"What do we do now?"

Knell almost whispered it.

"I think we'd better find a place for lunch."

"There's a good hotel round at Derbyhaven and we pass Mrs. Christian's with the key, sir."

"Right. Lead on, Knell."

They called with the key and drove along the coast road to the hotel. Knell parked the car and they stood looking at the scene.

The sky was clear and blue and there was a cold wind. A little sheltered bay to the left of Langness peninsula, which thrust out to sea and divided Castletown Bay from Derbyhaven and protected its waters from the prevailing winds. A large hotel, a smaller one with a queer name, the *Dandy Rig*, a row of cottages, a few villas, and a shop and post-office, all clustered round the end of the road. Ahead, a neat breakwater and Fort Island, joined by a causeway to the mainland and with a round fort and ruined oratory. Behind and beyond, the gentle rolling hills of Man, purple and brown with autumn tints and with little fields climbing their sides as far as cultivation could reach.

The tide was out. There were little boats and a cabin cruiser anchored in the sand and seaweed of the bay. Among them, the *Maggie*. In the foreground, men in rubber boots digging for bait. Lobster pots on the tideline. A man feeding the swans from a bucket. . . .

They turned to find a newcomer standing beside his own car in the park waiting for them. A man an inch taller than Littlejohn and as heavy. Between sixty and seventy, with a lined bronzed face, Roman nose, and broad chin. He gave you the impression of squinting, but a second look showed the dark eyes were a bit too narrow, too close together. He wore a tweed sports suit and heavy brogues.

"You the police on the Crennell case?"

"Yes, sir."

Knell's attitude had grown a bit deferential before the heavy stranger, who, even as he spoke, saluted passers-by and asked them in a patronising way, how they were. The traditional squire of a small community, being heavily gracious to the small fry and fiercely competitive among his equals. He raised his tweed cap and greeted a woman with a dachshund. She was good-looking and the newcomer turned twice to follow her with his eyes after she had passed.

"Found out anything?"

"This is Chief Inspector Littlejohn, of Scotland Yard, sir, who's in charge of the case."

"I thought *you* were in charge."

An impudent cut at Knell. The man didn't wait for an answer.

"Good-day to you, Littlejohn. I was a friend of Crennell's and I want to see the swine who's killed him brought to justice . . . hanged."

He said it through his teeth.

"We'll do our best, Mr. . . ."

"Mr. Morrison, sir. Sorry, I forgot."

Knell was a bit out of countenance.

"I'm a J.P. and I naturally want justice doing. Any way I can help, let me know. Call at my place for a drink. I'm usually in about this time. Knell knows where it is. You lunching here? I've just called for a drink. Off in five minutes. Join me."

The imperative invitation nettled Littlejohn.

"Not before lunch, sir, thanks."

The man's eyes narrowed, this time into an angry squint. "However, you know your own mind best. Probably see you later."

He vanished heavily inside the *Dandy Rig*.

"So that's Mr. Morrison, Knell? He doesn't seem to like me and I don't like him from what I've seen of him."

Knell's face broke into a smile.

"By jove, sir, it was good to see you refuse his drink. He's not used to that. It's usually law what he says. People jump to it when he wants anything. It's given me an appetite for lunch. . . ."

Littlejohn took a last look at the *Maggie*, rather forlorn and lying on her keel in the sand. He imagined Crennell, with all the time in the world at his disposal, tramping down to Derbyhaven with his buddy, Collister, taking her out on the tide to fish and, as he fished, looking at the panorama of gentle hills and patchwork of many-coloured fields, the quiet hamlet, and the pub for a drink when it was over.

And somebody had come along and put an end to it all. Thrown him in his own harbour, condemned him to wander about London docks until he was picked up, and then, when Finlo returned, smiling, to his old life, they'd shot him like a dog.

Littlejohn wasn't smiling as he entered the *Dandy Rig*. He'd known Crennell at his worst; without speech, or mind, or memory. Now he felt he knew him as he used to be, and the more he knew of him the better he liked him.

"Steak pie, sir?"

Knell awoke him from his reverie and he nodded agreement.

## THE HOUSE IN DRUIDALE

THE *Dandy Rig* hotel at Derbyhaven was quiet. Nobody around now that the season was over, except an odd local or two, like Morrison, calling for a drink or his lunch. Littlejohn and Knell had the place to themselves until the Big Shot arrived.

The Big Shot. That was the name Littlejohn mentally gave him. Later, his name turned out to be Nimrod Norton.

Norton entered the small dining-room with his wife. Between them, they seemed to fill the place. They were both fat and he entered before her, as though some exception had been made on his behalf in matters of courtesy. Before he saw Littlejohn and Knell, Mr. Norton slapped the waitress on the behind. Then he spotted the Chief Inspector and glared at him. Littlejohn disliked Mr. Norton from the start.

A tall man of nearly six feet and heavily built, like a Roman emperor. His height made him seem less obese than his wife, who was short with it. He had a face resembling a frog's. Bald, large ears, a shallow skull like a saucer above them. Heavy, bulbous nose, fleshy mouth, square chin and dark, slightly mongolian eyes. He wore a tweed suit, a bow tie, and suede shoes.

There was a pause, as though they were all holding their breath. Then everybody started to dance attendance on Mr. Nimrod Norton. The cheerful little manager, his equally cheerful wife, the potman, and the waitress. Like good natured people who rush to humour a baby, who otherwise will raise the roof with screams and lamentations.

"He's a big business man from over, sir, and he's had a nervous breakdown," the waitress explained to Knell by way of excusing her divided attentions.

"Kitty! The menu. . . ."

Mr. Norton interrupted, as he presumably did to his understrappers in his big office on the mainland. Even the few words he spoke, revealed that he had had lessons in elocution and that under his pompous and aggressive manner lay an element of uncertainty.



"It's a good job we've finished our meal," said Littlejohn. "That man gives me dyspepsia."

They left the room without waiting for coffee and made their way back to Castletown where more news might easily be waiting for them at the police station.

On the promenade, as they passed *Chanteclair*, they found Mrs. Christian and Mrs. Cottier, looking out for them.

"My sister wonders," said the spokesman, "if you could find some way of letting Nancy know her father's dead. It's so isolated at Druidale, and they're not on the telephone. The rest of the family aren't on speaking terms with Nancy and won't go to tell her, although Wilfred runs a car and could easily do it. It's not fair."

Knell rubbed his chin.

"We might telephone the constable at Ballaugh and ask him to go up on his bike, but it's a long way, even from Ballaugh."

"We can go ourselves. I'd like to talk to Nancy," said Littlejohn. "We'd better pick up the Archdeacon if he's free. He's the best man to break the news properly."

"You might tell Nancy that the funeral will likely be on Tuesday. The inquest's to-morrow and there's no sense in keeping him any longer."

More news at the police station. Scotland Yard had been on again. Another report from Amsterdam.

The Dutch police had been grilling Van Dam, who, whilst protesting he hadn't laid a finger on Leeuwens, had told the story of picking Crennell up from the river at Castletown.

The *Rijswijk* had left on the high-tide in a heavy sea mist. As they had crept to the mouth of the river, the look-out at the stern had spotted something floating in the water. Captain Leeuwens had been on the bridge and Van Dam on deck. The quayside and the left mole had not been visible and those watching the ship depart could not have seen what was happening.

They hadn't even needed to lower a boat. The body was so near the hull that Van Dam had thrown out the Jacob's ladder, gone down, brought it in with a boat-hook, and they had hauled it aboard.

Captain Leeuwens was a bad-tempered man and, as his ship had been held-up by delay in discharge of his timber cargo as well as the weather, had refused to put back in port. Both he and the mate knew Crennell and as

the ex-harbourmaster was alive, they determined to take him and leave him at the first port of call.

Crennell was a long time in recovering and they found he had a nasty wound on the skull, either from a blow or by hitting his head on the side as he fell. They had undressed him and put him to bed. The following morning, in mid-channel, Crennell seemed better, but he was completely bewildered, didn't know where he was or what had happened to him, and refused to talk.

In drying Crennell's clothes, they had found his wallet, which contained a large sum of money; a thousand pounds or thereabouts. Captain Leeuwens had asked Van Dam to take charge of the wallet and the money, dry them, and keep them safe for when Crennell departed. Van Dam had obeyed orders. Or so he said to the Dutch police, who seemed to doubt it.

The *Rijswijk* had docked in London and it was there that Crennell had vanished. His clothes had been left in his cabin, but the pockets had been emptied when the suit was dried. Crennell had simply dressed and wandered off. After making brief inquiries, Captain Leeuwens had refused to wait any longer and had sailed for his home port. Van Dam expressed his disapproval of the way Crennell had been left to his own devices. The *Rijswijk* ought to have stayed longer and the London police been informed about Crennell. According to Van Dam, his own conduct throughout had been impeccable and virtuous.

Littlejohn read the report carefully, puffing his pipe, his hat at the back of his head.

"The thousand pounds mentioned here. . . . Didn't Mrs. Cottier say Crennell had saved about that amount?"

"That's right, sir."

"Where did he bank, I wonder."

The local constable knew all about it.

"The Post Office, sir. I've seen him going in there and pulling a savings book out of his pocket as he went in."

"That means waiting till to-morrow, then, before we can find out if he made any big withdrawal."

"Not necessarily, sir. I saw the postmaster this mornin' on his way home to lunch. We might catch him on the telephone."

"Try, will you?"

Finlo Crennell had drawn a thousand pounds of his own money from his Post Office account two days before his disappearance!

"And why would he do that?" asked Knell rhetorically.

Back to Grenaby through the thin autumn sunshine. Knell blew the car horn at the vicarage gate and brought out an angry Maggie Keggin.

"Less noise, young man. The pazon's takin' his forty-winks after a hard mornin's work and is not to be woke. . . ."

But the Archdeacon was already at the door putting on his hat and coat. They told him how he could help and the gaitered legs were soon scrambling in the back of the car.

They joined the main Foxdale road and turned on the T.T. course at Ballacraine. The fine weather had brought out a lot of trippers and the roads were busy. Before reaching the village of Kirk Michael, Knell turned to the right and they began to climb the steep ascent to the inland hills.

The uplands were clear of mist and, as the car mounted, the whole panorama of Manx hills unfolded, patterns of greens, browns and purples under the afternoon sunshine and changing as the cloud shadows passed over them. The road skirted deep lonely valleys until it reached an isolated cottage, Brandywell, where it forked in three at a junction. A signpost marked the twisting track to the left. *Druidale*.

The three men in the police car spoke little. They all seemed occupied in admiring the view and enjoying the pleasant afternoon's jaunt. They might have been on a pleasure trip instead of the grim business of Finlo Crennell's murder.

The road soon wound out of sight of civilization. A wide expanse of silent and beautiful desolation. They were in a kind of hollow surrounded by hills everywhere, with now and then to the west a view of the sea between two peaks. On the rising land, sheep were grazing until it reached a height where no more vegetation would grow. The wide moorland was covered in a dozen different shades of green and stunted gorse still in bloom. Here and there a ruined cottage, deserted after a struggle by the crofters who could not raise a living from the hard soil.

In the valleys where the vegetation was better and where good trees would grow for shelter, one or two sheep farmers were holding out and it was to one of these homesteads that Knell was making his way.

The road descended to a mountain stream where they forded, rose again, and finally forked at a green gate. Half a mile down the side track

stood Charlie Cribbin's farm.

A ring of stunted trees protected the cottage. The entire place was built of stone. A cowshed, a sty in which the pigs were rioting for a meal, a henhouse, and the home itself, with a window on each side of the stone porch and three upstairs facing the moor.

Nancy Cribbin must have seen them as they turned in the by-road, for she was waiting in the porch for them to enter the yard. She held a baby in her arms, a child of about two, who buried his head in his mother's shoulder when the strangers arrived.

The woman seemed apprehensive as the men got out of the car and her look changed to one of surprise when she saw the Archdeacon.

"It's not Charlie, is it?" she said before she even greeted them.

"Why should it be Charlie, Mrs. Cribbin?"

"He's not been home all night."

A brief silence as they all thought out the implications of this new information. In the distance a curlew cried.

She didn't ask them in and they stood round the porch, a ragged little gathering, nobody quite knowing how to begin. From the house two more children appeared; a boy of about five and a little girl, fair, with long hair, who looked about three. The noticeable thing about the Cribbin family was that in spite of their remoteness from the world, they were all dressed in their Sunday best, like pioneers who in a far outpost, persist in the conventions of home.

Littlejohn watched Nancy Cribbin as she gathered her children round her. She was beautiful and she was afraid. She even made the cheap Sunday frock, which might have been bought from a chain-store, look elegant. She was tall and well-built and as dark as night. Jet black hair, large dark eyes, a straight nose, and full large lips. The type you might find far from Druidale on the Mediterranean. Difficult to think that Finlo Crennell and Mary Gawne, in a casual bout of illicit pleasure, had brought such a beauty into the world. Behind the ex-harbourmaster of Castletown or the common flighty Mary, must have been a better ancestry than either of them manifest.

...

"What did you want?"

She spoke softly with the Manx intonation.

The Archdeacon took control of the situation.

"We want to come inside and talk to you, Nancy."

"I'm sorry. I ought to have asked you in."

The living-room was tidy in a frugal way. Wooden cottage chairs, an old Manx wooden armchair, a modern grate in which logs were burning, a plain deal table covered with a chenille cloth. Two large photographs of a stern-looking man and woman, stiff in their best clothes, fierce before the camera. In patches, the wallpaper was peeling off with the damp. A cat with two kittens in the hearth and a half grown chicken in a box by the fire, lying on a piece of blanket.

The eldest child picked up the box with the pullet and showed it to the parson.

"It's sick."

In spite of the cleanliness of the house, there was a smell of straw, decayed leaves and manure, and a feeling of damp. Outside, the branches of the leafless trees shook in the breeze. A cow cried in the shed and the pigs were still squealing for food. Now and then, one of the hens would enter the room through the open door, pick around, and disappear again.

"I wasn't expecting anybody. You must excuse us not being straight. With Charlie not coming home, I've had to milk the cows myself and then there's the children. . . ."

She spoke well and behaved with a kind of native courtesy. Littlejohn wondered if Crennell had paid for her education at a good school somewhere.

"Please sit down. . . ."

They settled on the wooden chairs and Nancy brought another chair with a straw seat from the next room for Littlejohn, whose head, as he stood there, almost touched the ceiling.

"You can go and feed the hens, Harry."

The eldest child vanished in the room behind, returned with a can of corn, and took his sister outside. They could hear them talking to the fowls.

"Chuck, chuck, chuck. Don't let Blackie have it all. Drive her away. . . ."

The woman still carried the youngest child in her arms, which were too white and shapely for the rough life she was leading. She seemed to hold the baby more firmly than was necessary, as though, in her fear, trying to find comfort in clinging to something she loved.

"We're sorry to have to tell you, Nancy, that your father died last night."

The healthy pink of her complexion turned to chalk white, but it was evident at once that she had been expecting something even worse.

"I thought . . . Charlie . . ."

And then she gathered herself together.

"How did it happen? Did he come home? He went away, I know. They told me . . ."

"He was found in London. He'd lost his memory. This is Chief Inspector Littlejohn, of the London police, who brought your father home. Last night, your father went out alone and was . . ."

The Archdeacon put his hand on Mrs. Cribbin's shoulder and gently said the rest.

"Somebody shot him. He's dead, Nancy. They're burying him on Tuesday."

Nancy Cribbin sat on the only free chair and this time she hid her face in her child's shoulder and sobbed.

"Why couldn't they have left him alone? He was always a good man. He was good to me and the children. . . ."

"Who do you mean by *they*, Nancy?"

"Everybody. Everybody interfering with him and taking their troubles to him. As if he hadn't enough troubles of his own."

"What troubles had he, then?"

She looked the parson full in the face.

"Me. I was his trouble. They all blamed him because of me."

"These two gentlemen are going to find out who did it. You know Mr. Knell, of the Douglas police, don't you?"

"Can't say I do. Pleased to meet you."

"I'll see that a car comes to pick you up for the funeral, Nancy. You must come. I shall be there, so you'll have a friend. And Mrs. Cottier will be there, too. Don't worry about the rest."

"I'll have to get somebody to mind the children. But . . ."

"What about your husband, Mrs. Cribbin?"

Littlejohn had been watching her eyes. She was still afraid.

"He hasn't been home all night. It's happened before, but he promised it wouldn't occur again. Last time, he went with some friends to an auction sale in Glen Helen. He stayed all night at his mother's in Michael. He said he wouldn't do it again. . . ."

Knell had told Littlejohn he didn't think much of Charlie Cribbin. Now his look was full of *I told you so*.

"With his going off the drink and saying he'd stop that way for good, I thought something bad had happened."

"When did your husband leave?"

"Yesterday afternoon. It was Saturday and he sometimes went down to Ballaugh through the glen. It's quite a walk, but he said he'd better do it on foot. It was very misty on the tops and the road is narrow. I daren't leave the children to go and see what happened and there's been nobody up here all day."

"Did he say he was calling anywhere particular, Nancy?"

"No. But he might have taken the bus at the bottom and gone to Michael to see his dad and mother. I'm that worried. . . ."

She had kept control of herself so far, but the strain was beginning to tell, and talking of it made her worse. A touch of hysteria rang in her voice.

"We'll go and see what we can find out. Don't worry, Nancy!"

"Have you seen your father lately, Mrs. Cribbin?"

Littlejohn felt he must ask it before they left her for a day or two.

"He came one day just before he disappeared."

"Did he seem all right?"

"Yes. He used to come about once a month."

She seemed to be evading the issue.

"*Did he seem all right*, Mrs. Cribbin? This is important."

She was almost angry as she turned on him.

"What do you want me to say?"

"The truth."

She paused.

"He had a long talk with Charlie, if that's what you want to know."

"What was it about?"

"I don't know. They stood in the yard as they talked. Charlie had been worried for a long time. I asked him what was the matter, but he wouldn't say. After he spoke to my father, he seemed easier in his mind. He slept better and stopped moping about."

"Do you think your father was going to help him? I mean, had your husband any money troubles and was your father going to put him straight?"

"That may have been it. We haven't done very well since we came here five years ago. The winters have been bad and we've lost a lot of sheep. It worried Charlie."

"And that is all?"

She looked at him candidly.

"Yes. Should there be anything else?"

Outside, the children were still feeding the hens, chasing off the greedy ones, encouraging the timid. "Chuck, chuck, chuck." The child in Nancy Cribbin's arms was asleep.

The three men rose as though at a signal.

"Well, Nancy, be brave. I'll send a car for you, as promised, in time for the funeral. Have you some black clothes?"

"Yes, Archdeacon. Thank you for all you've done."

"And now we'll go and inquire about your husband."

They all went to the door. The child in arms began to whimper as Mrs. Cribbin moved. The other two ran to their mother and stood by her.

"How far does your land extend?"

Littlejohn stood at the gate, looking over the landscape. A vast stretch of moor. Here and there a fertile green patch, then heather and blaeberry, with dark brown, rotten peaty soil between. Sheep dotted about. Then the rising ground to Snaefell and the high hills. Through a gap between two hillsides the road to Sulby down Tholt-y-Will was visible, with cars slowly climbing it.

The Archdeacon gave the children a shilling each and the two elder ones looked up at their mother, questioning what to do with the money. There were no shops and they hadn't had the experience of spending. They thought the bright coins were some kind of new toy.

"Good-bye, then. We'll let you know, Nancy. God bless you all."

The parson entered the car.

"There are five hundred acres, all told, but it's not all good by a long way."

Nancy Cribbin had suddenly remembered Littlejohn's question.

"Do they go as far as the house by the ford?"

It was Knell who spoke. There was an eager look in his face . . . eager and anxious.

"Not really. But Charlie has the key in case anybody wants to see it and they let him use it for storing sheep hurdles and wire and such while



nobody else wants it. Why?"

"I was just wondering. It's nothing."

They said good-bye again and drove to the end of the farm-street.

"What's this about the cottage, Knell?"

"I think we ought to go back there before we go down to Ballaugh to inquire about Charlie Cribbin. You remember there's a gated road just past the ford. *Montpellier*, it's called. As I got out of the car to open the gate, I looked at the old house. The key was in the door. I didn't think much about it at the time, but when she said Charlie wasn't home, I suddenly thought we ought to go and see if all was right, there."

"Very well. Drive back."

The house stood empty and boarded-up near the ford on the winding road facing Snaefell. Through the gap on the rising moor opposite they could see Cribbin's farm in the hollow by the trees.

A rather large house, with a porch and five windows on the front. "J.B. 1875" over the door. A holly bush to the right of the door, dark and overgrown, and behind the house, a copse of tortured trees. Ruined stone buildings, sheep-pens, outhouses. A cement face and a grey slate roof, surrounded by a dry stone wall, crumbling in places and repaired by iron bed-ends. Rushes in the overgrown garden, invaded by sheep and trippers in the season. Tall chimneys. . . .

The crackle of leaves and the squeaking of twined branches in the bare trees made them start and turn round. They felt there were footsteps following them.

The place was evidently the haunt of picnic parties and lovers. In the garden the charred sticks of summer fires; on the cement of the walls the vows of courtship. *Ken Cowley loves Lily Tyrer*. Two hearts transfixed by an arrow. Initials, V.B. on one side and A.H. on the other.

The three men stood looking at the house for a minute and then approached through the side gate; the front one was wired-up and the gateway piled with debris.

There was the key in the door, as Knell had said. They turned it and went in. Knell took out his torch and shone it into the darkness. A decrepit staircase and a room off each side of the hall. They entered the one to the left. A jumble of wooden hurdles, tins of sheep-dip and paint, rolls of barbed wire.

They didn't notice the details of the other room. Stretched on the bare boards of the floor, face downwards, arms outspread, was a large, well-built man in his best suit, bright leather leggings and heavy black boots. He was lying as though someone had carried his inert body and pitched it there like a sack of rubbish.

"Charlie Cribbin. . . ."

He had been shot through the head, like Finlo Crennell.

## THE AFFAIRS OF CHARLIE CRIBBIN

THINGS couldn't have turned out more awkward. Instead of being able to return to Grenaby, the party had to get busy and set in motion the usual machinery of the law. There wasn't a telephone for miles; the nearest policeman was at Ballaugh, six miles or more across the moor; there was the bad news to break to Nancy Cribbin; and the Archdeacon to get home to Grenaby for the evening service.

On top of that, Knell stood at the door of the empty house, looked to the west where the sun was already setting in a magnificent coloured haze, and sighed.

"The mist's coming down again. It'll be thick in an hour's time."

Out at sea, they could see it forming already. The water was not visible from where they stood, but above it, a long roll of grey haze like a folded blanket.

And then they had a bit of luck. The sounds of an approaching car came from the direction of Brandywell cottage and a large saloon drew in sight, almost too big for the narrow road. At the ford, it halted, as though the driver hesitated to wet the wheels or splash the bright bodywork. Like a horse which jibs at a water-jump in a steeplechase. Then the car moved slowly through the stream, topped the rise, and came to a halt at the gate across the road. A woman in a fur coat climbed out, opened the gate, the car ran through, and she closed it.

Littlejohn hurried to them and held up his hand.

His eyes met the slightly mongolian ones of Mr. Nimrod Norton!

"I'm a police officer and would like your help. There's been an accident in the house there."

He didn't say a murder, because the woman sitting by Norton's side looked timid and apprehensive, as though she almost scented disaster.

The Big Shot was obviously annoyed and petulantly slid on the hand-brake.

"This is a nuisance and you won't have to be long. I can't spare the time. We've a call to make and we want to be back before dark. Haven't I

seen you somewhere before?"

Nimrod Norton was wearing a heavy camel-hair overcoat which made him look larger than ever, and a jaunty cloth cap.

"I'm sorry, sir, but this is in the name of the Law."

"Be quick, then. What's it all about and what do you want of me?"

"What is the matter?"

Littlejohn found himself looking into a pair of frightened blue eyes. Mrs. Norton had been good-looking in her youth. Now, her fair hair was obviously bleached and she was heavily made-up, but there were still traces of beauty in spite of the weight of middle-age. She cast a momentary glance at her husband, as though asking permission to intervene from a habitual bully.

"I'm sorry it's a case of murder and as we've only one car here, we shall require your help."

"Damn nuisance. Who's been killed and what do we do?"

"We've just found the body of a man in the empty house there. He's been shot. He lived at the farm just along the road."

"Not Mr. Cribbin!"

Mrs. Norton almost screamed it.

"Yes."

"Oh. . . ."

She was going to faint. Nimrod Norton was annoyed about it.

"Now don't you start and have one of your *does* here. It's bad enough as it is, without you being ill. Take a swig of that."

He took a silver flask from the pocket of the car and passed it without solicitude or even unscrewing the cap. His wife gulped eagerly at the spirit and the colour came back in her cheeks.

"Mrs. Cribbin is a friend of ours, you see, and we were calling at the farm to see her. You must excuse me, but it's a shock."

She started to weep bitterly.

Looking at her, Littlejohn was sure he'd seen her somewhere even before they met at the *Dandy Rig*; but couldn't bring to mind when and where.

Norton climbed heavily from the car, eyed the road, and then got back.

"I'll drive to the house, then. Get in if you like."

It was no distance and Littlejohn walked by the side of the vehicle. In the back seat, he made out a number of parcels tied up with string. A doll,

and a teddy-bear which had a look of Mr. Nimrod Norton in a good mood. Mrs. Norton struggled to master her feelings and dabbed her eyes with a small handkerchief.

They quickly formed a plan of action. Knell would go in the police-car to the nearest telephone at Ravensdale, in Ballaugh Glen. There he would send for the constable at Ballaugh and to Douglas for the technicians. He would, after that, return for Littlejohn.

Meanwhile, Mr. Norton would drive the Archdeacon to the Cribbins' farm, where the parson would break the news to Mrs. Cribbin and make arrangements for the children to be taken with their mother to their grandparents at Kirk Michael. If possible he would also get some local farmer to take charge of the Cribbin farm. After that, Mr. Norton would drive the Archdeacon home in time for church.

Littlejohn found himself alone with the dead man in the fading light. He stood for a minute at the door of the forsaken cottage, looking across the moor at the scene of beautiful desolation. The air had thickened and, in the dying day, the colours of the landscape had turned sombre. The long sweep of rough land, ending in the rising hills and a background of mountains, seemed ominous now. Deserted crofts and the very house on the threshold of which he stood had the unholy atmosphere of places which once were filled with human life and voices and whence now the inhabitants had fled from some unknown terror. A thin, cold breeze sprang up and shook the tortured branches and rattled the dead leaves of the trees in the little copse behind. Everything seemed to be waiting for something. A sheep bleated plaintively and, far away, a curlew called again.

Littlejohn filled his pipe, lit it, turned up the collar of his coat and drew the garment closely round him.

The body lay just as they had found it. A tall, heavily-built man of forty or thereabouts. The bare head covered in brown bristly hair, growing long and low in the nape of the neck. The outspread hands were large and ill cared-for.

The Chief Inspector knelt and raised the head. Death must have come quickly and unexpectedly. The face was peaceful and the eyes closed. A heavy face with a long thin nose, square jaw, and narrow forehead. The man seemed asleep, except that there was a clean wound between the eyes from which a thin trickle of dried blood was smeared. The body was cold and rigor was setting in. The bullet had passed clean through the head and

Littlejohn found it lodged in the wall in a dead line with the door and the spot where Cribbin had fallen.

Outside, the ground was sodden and muddy. Cattle and sheep had trampled it and made such a confusion that footprints were impossible to trace. There were a few cigarette packets and chocolate papers strewn about. Littlejohn stood with his dead pipe between his teeth and regarded the place. *Ken Cowley loves Lily Tyrer. . . .* He found himself wondering who Ken and Lily might be and what had happened to their romance. And *Joe Sprott, Wigan, was here, Aug. 1951.* Where was the intrepid Joe, who had climbed on the top of the porch and carved details of his feat over the door?

Nothing inside the house. The staircase was decrepit and shuddered under the Inspector's weight. A landing, two bedrooms, and a box-room. Not a trace of footprints; only a lot of fallen plaster and decay. Downstairs, no signs of recent disturbance. The murderer must just have entered, shot his victim, and vanished again in the loneliness around.

With gentle hands, Littlejohn turned out the pockets of the dead man, and placed the contents in order on the floor beside him. Side pockets; two used and one loaded sporting cartridges, a piece of binder twine, a Yale and two larger keys tied with string together, a packet of cheap cigarettes, and some matches. Inside breast pocket; a wallet, two Board of Agriculture forms filled in with many mistakes in a childish hand, a letter about the sale of some sheep and another giving the recent prices of stock in Ramsey mart. Trousers pockets; some loose change, a large clasp knife, a cheque-book and an indelible pencil.

The cheque book conveyed nothing. Indecipherable names on the counterfoils, with amounts. A bank in Ramsey. The notes of the drawings were written in indelible pencil.

The wallet held a driving licence, two pound notes and a dirty one for ten shillings. A sheet of figures in an unknown hand, which, on taking them to the light, Littlejohn was able to recognize as some kind of farmer's statement of assets and liabilities. He carefully perused the details. From what he could make out, the dead man had on the recent September date of the account, been insolvent. He owed more than a thousand more than he possessed.

A battered photograph of an old man and woman standing at a cottage door. On the back in thin pencil: *Mother and Dad, 1946.* Two stamps

removed from an envelope. A note from the bank: *Regret to inform you that by payment of your cheque to Corlett, your account becomes overdrawn seventy-seven pounds. Kindly pay in.*

The wallet held a small diary in an elastic band. Littlejohn turned the pages. Pedigrees of sheep-dogs and details of their successes. Dates of sheep-dog trials, lists of figures, notes of stock sales and purchases. There was no date order; the entries were all jumbled up and the diary itself was four years old. Scrawled addresses on the fly-leaf and adjacent page; auctioneers, fellow farmers, merchants, and agricultural engineers. Then: *Mr. Finlo Crennell, 24b Queen Street, Castletown. Mr. & Mrs. Nimrod Norton, Pontresina, Sefton Park, Liverpool. Mr. & Mrs. John Cribbin, Primrose Cottage, Kirk Michael.*

Scribbled almost illegibly in the margin and at right-angles to the addresses, *Manninagh, October, 1929. . . .*

In the distance, the whine of a car and soon Knell came in sight.

"I've laid it all on, sir."

Knell grew as silent as Littlejohn. There seemed to be little to say and the atmosphere of the place was against it.

"Did you . . . ?"

"Nothing useful, Knell, except Cribbin's wallet, which has some addresses in it. I'll take it with me. By the way, the address of Mr. Nimrod Norton is in the notebook here. It looks as though Mr. and Mrs. Norton were on their way to Cribbin's farm for a visit of some kind. Did you leave them at the gate?"

"No, sir. I went down the farm-street with them and into the yard. I don't like Norton, sir, and I wanted to see him safely there."

"The Archdeacon would have seen to that."

"I just felt I'd like to . . . ."

"I know. You were curious. I'd have been the same myself."

"Mr. Kinrade had told Mrs. Cribbin when I left. She was just knocked all of a heap. She didn't cry out or shed any tears. By the way, she knows the Nortons quite well. Mrs. Norton rushed out of the car and kissed her and the kids when they got there. And after the Archdeacon had said there'd been an accident and Mrs. Cribbin had asked if he was dead and the parson had said yes, Mrs. Norton took-on something awful and they had to give her drinks from a flask. And then Mrs. Cribbin said, 'Don't take on so, mother . . . .' *Mother. . . .*"

"That's it, Knell. I knew I'd seen the woman before. It was the likeness in the wedding group in Crennell's house. The nose and eyes. I remembered them. She must have married again. The man she ran away with was called Tramper, or something like that."

Knell whistled.

"We'll have to have a talk with Mr. and Mrs. Norton, sir, won't we?"

"We will, Knell."

From the opposite direction, the nearest way to Douglas, another pair of police cars were approaching, followed by a doctor's car and an ambulance. The convoy undulated along the narrow well-made road, through the ford and the gateway, and halted at the house. The routine squad took possession.

"A farmer called Kneale, in Ravensdale, has promised to send a man up to Cribbin's place to look after the stock, chief. And on my way back here, I passed Norton's car full-up with Mrs. Cribbin and the children and the Reverend gentleman, on their way to Michael."

"What about the farmhouse? Will it be locked-up, Knell?"

Knell triumphantly fished in the pocket of the car and produced a Yale key like the one Littlejohn had found in Charlie Cribbin's pocket.

"I asked if the police might have a key, sir. I said we might like to take a peek and see that all was right sometime. Mrs. Cribbin let me have a spare, and I said I'd see she got it back again when we'd finished with it."

Dusk had fallen and the clouds had lowered over the hills. Already on the higher ground wisps of mist were blowing and now and then, the car passed through them and Knell slowed down.

"If we do take a look now, it'll have to be a quick one. As you say, Knell, there looks like being another sea-fog to-night. Turn down to the farm then."

The place was silent, except for the sounds of the stock moving in the out-buildings. It brought to Littlejohn's mind the first stages of the desertion which had gone on all over the crofts of the Island, the slow creeping death of unprofitable little holdings and their return to the wild. He thought of the statement of accounts in his pocket. Another insolvent farmer. Charlie Cribbin was not managing to pay his way, and, sooner or later, the holding in Druidale would go the way of the rest.

They parked the car in the yard and entered the house. It was still cosy and warm, with the fire dying, perhaps for ever, and the remnants of a meal



on the table where they had left it. The cat and kittens and the sick chicken had apparently gone with the children. Two sheep-dogs, chained at their kennels, barked briefly and then retired to sleep again.

Inside, there was nothing to help the police. The drawers of the bedroom chests and the sideboard held a sparse quantity of household linen and clothing. In the top drawer of the sideboard, a conglomeration of paid bills, income tax, and agricultural board forms, catalogues and advertisements. Cribbin had been in the habit of putting all his unpaid bills behind the picture of his mother which hung on one side of the sideboard, balanced on the other by his father's.

"There surely must be a family treasure-box somewhere," said Littlejohn. "Where are the usual births, marriage and other certificates, the insurance policies for the stock and farm, and any other valuable papers?"

At last they found it, under the brass-knobbed bed in the room of Cribbin and his wife. A large, old-fashioned tin trunk. It was locked.

Littlejohn took from his pocket an object like a pen-knife, armed, in place of blades, with half a dozen instruments like buttonhooks of various sizes. Knell's eyes opened wide.

"This was given to me by Inspector Luc, of the Police Judiciaire, in Paris, Knell. It's known as a *rossignol*." And he flung back the lid of the box. When he saw the contents, he wished he hadn't opened it.

It was apparently the place where Nancy Cribbin hid things from the busy curiosity of her children and perhaps her husband. A box of chocolates, a small doll, a toy motor car, a new pipe, a gauze stocking filled with odds and ends. She had obviously been buying by instalments and when she could spare the money, the gifts for her family at the coming Christmas. . . .

The whole business was tragic. A man, either shiftless or fighting a losing battle on a farm which didn't pay . . . almost penniless, by the looks of his bankrupt accounts. And his wife doing her best to keep up appearances. . . .

The papers they'd expected were in a packet tied with string in one corner of the trunk. Marriage lines, three children's birth certificates, paid doctor's bills, a gold sovereign, three pounds fifteen in cash, insurance policies for the farm and stock and one for a hundred pounds on the life of Charlie Cribbin. A bundle of photographs. Wedding groups, a snapshot of Finlo Crennell in his uniform, more amateur photographs of the children,

and Nancy Cribbin holding a baby. Then, a cheap studio portrait of Charlie Cribbin dressed as a sailor. . . .

"So he was a sailor, before he took to farming, Knell?"

"I didn't know that, chief. But a lot of boys here have been to sea, you know."

It didn't seem right rummaging in Nancy's private affairs, but as likely as not, was the only way of getting any background. There was a bundle of letters, for example, tied-up with blue ribbon from a chocolate-box. Littlejohn left them as they were and, with another twist of the *rossignol*, locked the box again.

"Well; that's that. Nothing much."

They locked the farm and Knell, finding the poultry had retired to roost, shut them in by sliding the door over the hole at the base of the henhouse door.

"There's no foxes on the Island to worry them, but there are stray ferrets and polecats around. Better be safe than sorry."

The farm-hand from Ravensdale was approaching in a land-rover to see everything safe for the night. He bade them good evenin'.

"Bad do about Charlie Cribb'n. Never come across a murder on the Islan' before. Seems a fellah isn't safe nowhere these days, leck."

The clouds hung over the hilltops and moor as they crossed the wild track and made the steep descent to Ravensdale. In Ballaugh Glen, which led to the main road, the mist gathered about the trees, bringing night on earlier. It was almost dark. The chapel was lit up and knots of people stood round the door like frightened ghosts talking about the disaster in the hills above.

Primrose Cottage was on the roadside at Kirk Michael, a small house, whitewashed and neat, with a tiny garden in front. There were lights on upstairs and down. The police car drew up, and Littlejohn and Knell climbed out and knocked at the cottage door.

The house seemed full to overflowing. Cribbin's parents, a decent couple of about seventy, had taken it hard and were sitting stunned before the fire. On the rug, a neighbour was undressing the two elder children ready for bed. They could not understand what had happened or why they were on holidays with their grandparents again. And they watched the adults with puzzled eyes, unused to the atmosphere of grief and shock.

Nancy Cribbin was sitting at the back of the house, calm and as pale as death, like one trying to realize the truth.

"We just called to see if you'd arrived safely, Mrs. Cribbin."

"Yes, Mr. Littlejohn, and thank you for looking after things. I can't realize it's true. Did you want to know anything?"

"No, thanks. We won't bother you now. But if there's anything we can do . . ."

"I don't think so. I can't think."

"Mrs. Norton is your mother, isn't she?"

"Yes. They're coming back later to do what they can."

"Mr. Norton is her second husband, then?"

"Yes. Mr. Tramper died five years ago and she married again the next year. This is the first time I've met Mr. Norton. He was very kind to us and said he'd look after everything. Charlie's father and mother have taken it bad."

Neither had spoken. Just shaken hands with the two detectives and lapsed into silence again.

"We'll go now. If there's anything at all, Mrs. Cribbin, just tell the local policeman and he'll get in touch with us. I don't mean in connection with the crime alone. Anything we can do. . . ."

"Thank you, Mr. Littlejohn. It's the children. I don't know what . . ."

More arrivals. The policeman's wife, and then the vicar. There wasn't room for them all in the cottage. The two police officers went on their way.

There was no mist on the Ballacraine Road and it continued clear after that, except over the top of Foxdale where they ran into cloud for a time. Soon they were in Castletown.

"Let's call on the Nortons first . . . Derbyhaven, isn't it?"

They found them just sitting down to dinner at the *Dandy Rig*. Mr. Norton's temper hadn't improved in spite of the day's tragedy. He flung down his napkin and rose, and his wife followed suit.

"It's a good job it's a cold meal. We can't seem to get much peace. What do you want with us now, Inspector?"

His wife watched him with frightened eyes. She always seemed to be expecting a scene.

"Thank you for seeing Mrs. Cribbin and her children safe."

"Least we could do. Specially as they're *in the family*."

He sneered and his wife turned her head away.

"I know all about Nancy. Knew it before I married Mrs. Norton. Let bygones be bygones. Nobody's business but their own. But I never bargained for this. I'm here for my health. Had an illness and here to recuperate. Instead of which . . . "

"How long have you been here, sir?"

"About a fortnight. Why? Don't try to link me with these murders, Inspector. I never knew Crennell and as for Nancy . . . this is the first time I've met her and *what* a time!"

"Mind if I ask your wife a question or two, sir?"

Mr. Nimrod Norton looked angrier than ever. His neck grew inflated like a tyre.

"I won't have her worried by anybody. She's put up with enough for one day."

Mrs. Norton touched his sleeve and he shook off her hand.

"I don't mind answering questions, Nim, if they'll help."

"All right. There'd better not be many. We want our meal. We've got to get back to Kirk Michael to-night and Lord knows how the weather'll turn out. This is a pretty kettle of fish for a sick man, I must say. Get it over, then."

There was nobody else in the room and, as the waitress entered with another course, Mr. Norton angrily waved his hand at her in dismissal. The detectives stood at the table like applicants for jobs.

"You were born in Castletown, Mrs. Norton?"

"Yes. In Quay Lane. My sister, as well."

"You lived with Mr. and Mrs. Crennell when they married?"

"Yes. He was at sea and my sister wanted company."

"Did Mr. Crennell have any enemies then, or was he ever in trouble of any kind?"

Norton went on with his meal, busily eating his cold roast beef, trying to look as if he didn't care, but his slanting eyes were busy watching all that went on.

"No. Finlo was a good man. I don't think he ever had an enemy. Nobody had a bad word for him."

"What did he do at sea?"

"I think he started as a galley-boy and rose to second mate on a coaster. Then, he left to be harbourmaster here. He had his first-mate's ticket, you know."

"Was he ever master of a private yacht?"

A flicker of fear or uneasiness in the blue eyes and then,

"He always worked on one of the Morrison boats. They were Castletown owned. Mr. Morrison had a yacht and he manned it from his own sailors when he used it. Finlo went on one or two trips with the yacht."

"You've seen Nancy a time or two since you and your husband arrived?"

"Yes. My husband took me to-day, but, as he didn't want to go before, I hired a car."

"Did you know the farm wasn't paying?"

"Yes."

Mr. Norton struggled to empty his mouth.

"So did I. Cribbin wanted to borrow money from me, but I don't invest in farms. Told him so."

"When was that, sir?"

"Just before we came here. He wrote to me asking me to lend him a thousand pounds. The season had been bad, he said. I've been ill, as I said before. That stopped me considering it properly. I'd have turned him down flat, but my wife wouldn't let it drop. Didn't feel disposed to go and look into his affairs till to-day. Now, it's too late."

He returned to his meal.

"Better let her finish her meal now. We don't want to be here all night. We've to go to Kirk Michael."

"Do you think he was arranging to borrow the money elsewhere?"

Mrs. Norton looked timidly at her husband and then replied.

"He might have asked Finlo."

"Who would, doubtless, have let him have the money?"

"Certainly. But I'm sure Nancy would try to persuade him not to ask Finlo, because he was retired and living on his pension and his small savings."

"I see. Well, thank you for your help."

"*Goodnight.*"

Mr. Norton applied the closure and rang the bell for the next course.

Knell and Littlejohn stood on the doorstep of the hotel for a minute and looked across the bay. The tide was in and had filled the harbour. The navigation lights shone on the breakwater. The hotel on Langness was closed, but a solitary window was illuminated, giving the place a haunted

look. The lighthouse at Langness flashed its beam across the water. The curtained windows of the cottages glowed softly. Out at sea, the siren of a passing ship. They started out for Castletown.

No more news at the police station, only alarm and excitement at yet another murder. Knell and Littlejohn left for Grenaby, and Knell dropped his companion at the vicarage gate and went off home to Douglas, where he had lived since his marriage.

Littlejohn stood for a while, listening to the noise of the river and the distant voices of people leaving church. The air was clear there and stars were shining. An out-of-the-way place, but homely and serene after the tragedy and loneliness of the hills they had just left.

The vicar was not yet home, so Littlejohn, after telephoning to his wife, sat to wait in the study for him. The house was empty and silent. Mrs. Keggin had left the evening meal ready and gone with the parson to service.

The Chief Inspector put his hand in his pocket for his pipe and his fingers met the photograph he'd thrust there earlier in the day in Finlo Crennell's house. It seemed weeks since. He took it out and looked hard at it.

The group of men standing by the yacht in Cannes harbour. Crennell in his uniform, smiling, as usual. Morrison, the owner in his yachting cap, nautical jacket, and flannels. Two more hands. The boat itself was trim and white, worthy any day to tie up with the finest craft in Europe at Cannes.

The photograph was a sharp one and the name of the yacht was clear but diminutive. Littlejohn took out his pocket lens and examined it. *Manninagh*. He turned over the card. In pencil, *Cannes*, 1929.

With a start, Littlejohn opened the diary he had removed from the pocket of the dead man at Druidale that afternoon. Hastily he turned to the list of addresses again and the note scribbled alongside them.

*Manninagh. October 1929.*

MONDAY was a good drying day. High clouds, clear blue sky, a stiff little breeze, and everybody's washing flapping on the lines, waving horizontally like bunting.

There had been a preliminary shower about dawn which had cleared away all the tarnish from the fog. The streets of Castletown were fresh and clean and even the old castle carried a well-washed look. The two narrow main streets which met in the square were filled with shoppers and delivery vans; shopkeepers were busy sweeping out their premises and arranging their windows. A kind of spring-cleaning was going on after the week-end's mist and damp.

When Littlejohn and Knell arrived at the police station as the castle clock indicated around 9.45 with its single finger, the officer in charge had almost done a day's work. He had a bewildered expression.

"Look at all these, sir. I just don't understand it all."

He waved six or seven letters in his large fist.

"Three people . . . separate people, have already confessed to the murder of Finlo Crennell and another four have solved the crime for us. To say nothin' of a dozen or more telephone calls askin' us what we're doin' to capture the criminal, as it's not safe to go out."

Littlejohn laughed and lit his pipe.

"You're not used to murder here, are you, Moore? You should see the post-desk at Scotland Yard every day. It needs a special department to sort out the wheat from the chaff. Sometimes we get a hint but for the most part the letters come from all the clever boys, the crackpots, and the malcontents of half the country. What have you got?"

*I shot Finlo Crennell because he was in love with my wife. . . . I am waiting for you to call and arrest me and I will show you the shotgun I used. . . . Henry Geddes.*

"Geddes is a bit potty. He's given himself up a time or two in connection with crimes we knew somebody else did. There's one here, too, like it. This chap's off his rocker, as well."

Another confession, only this time the motive was public service. Finlo Crennell had been swindling the harbour board of its dues for years. It was signed *Pro Bono Publico*.

"He thinks he's anonymous, but everybody in town knows who it is. Mortimer Skillicorn, an alcoholic."

Littlejohn turned over the letters. The ones telling the police how to do the job were a bit more interesting.

*Have you asked the woman called Norton what her maiden name was and what she's doing in the same town as the man who once betrayed her? You'll find her at the Dandy Rig.*

"Perhaps the writer's got something there, although we're well aware of it all. What's this?"

*Why don't you ask Charlie Cribbin what he was doing in Castletown on Saturday night? Funny his illegitimate father-in-law should be murdered just as Charlie was around?*

"This was written before news of Charlie's death got about. I must say our correspondents have got quickly off the mark."

"Yes, sir. All the envelopes were local. Five were pushed under the door here; the others must have been posted yesterday and the post office brought them in specially after the collections."

"Well, Moore, I'd like you and your colleagues to get round in Castletown and try to find out if Cribbin actually was here on Saturday night. Most likely one of the pubs will have seen him. . . ."

"Very good, sir. Shall I file the letters?"

"Yes. Look into them all, though. It wouldn't do for us to get a real confession, ignore it, and then, after a week or so, find ourselves led by other hard-working ways to the very doorstep of the confessed criminal. As for the rest of the good advice, we'll look after it."

One anonymous writer had indicted Mrs. Cottier, point blank. Another had again accused Mrs. Nimrod Norton of murdering her brother-in-law in connection with what was described as the mysterious death of the late Mrs. Crennell, which had all the signs of poisoning.

"Let's go and talk to Mrs. Cottier again about Mrs. Nimrod Norton, Knell. Funny, she didn't tell us she was staying at Derbyhaven. You'd think that Mrs. Christian, living on the road there, would surely have seen them passing."

But Mrs. Christian hadn't.



They found the two sisters sitting at the table writing letters. A bottle of ink between them, as they sat facing one another on opposite sides, a cheap writing-pad apiece, and a scratchy pen. To see them dipping alternately in the inkpot reminded Littlejohn of a rhythmic game or of the monotonous little endless processes carried-on in mass-production workshops. A small boy admitted the detectives.

"We're just sendin' out invitations to the funeral, which is to-morrow. The inquest's this afternoon. Walter's boy, Fred here, is going to take them round the town when we've finished them."

"And I'm gettin' twopence hal' penny a letter, like the post," added the bright lad.

"We've a lot of relatives and friends of ours on the mainland to write to as well."

There was a pause in the correspondence.

"Did you want anything?"

"Of course they want something. What else should they call for?"

Mrs. Christian was getting annoyed with her plaintive sister.

"You've heard that Charlie Cribbin died yesterday, Mrs. Cottier?"

The late Finlo's housekeeper was suddenly seized with such a fit of trembling that she had to lay down the pen. Her fingers were all covered in ink.

Mrs. Christian made clicking noises with her tongue.

"You shouldn't have mentioned it. Since the news arrived at eight o'clock, I've been able to do no good with her. She thinks she'll be the next. I'd only just got her settled, and now you come and start her off all over again."

Mrs. Cottier made wailing noises and her teeth chattered.

"Somebody's goin' to wipe us all out. Mark my words. As soon as poor Finlo's laid to rest, I'm goin' off the Island. I'm not havin' my throat cut in my bed."

"Be quiet! Nobody's going to cut your throat. The police are here, aren't they? Who'd want to kill you? You haven't done anything."

Whereupon Mrs. Christian rose, uncorked the bottle labelled *Mixture*, filled up a tablespoon with the transparent contents, rammed it down her sister's throat, and took a good dose herself. Then she administered another half spoonful apiece for makeweight.

"Pull yourself together."

Mrs. Cottier hiccupped to show she was doing her best.

"A secret recipe of my grandfather's," explained Mrs. Christian. "A tonic and pick-me-up."

Littlejohn could have recited the prescription from the aroma which was slowly filling the room.

The remedy seemed to have an immediate effect on Mrs. Cottier. She drew herself up and denounced Mrs. Christian.

"And don't you keep pickin' on me. I know they called to see me, so why do you keep interferin'? Speak when you're spoke to. This is *my* murder business and I'll have you know it."

Mrs. Christian rose, breathed heavily, and looked ready to start a scene like one of long ago between Betsy Prig and Sairey Gamp.

"Do you mind, Mrs. Christian?"

Mrs. Cottier took another dose of the *Mixture*, this time without the assistance of the spoon.

"Yes. *Do you mind?*" she said.

Whereat Mrs. Christian rose with great dignity, put on her hat and coat, took out a large purse from one of the drawers of the congested furniture, and made for the door.

"I'm going to do some shopping. I hope you'll realize the wrong you've done me when you come-to. For myself, I forgive you. You're under the influence of drugs, not being used to overdoses of grandfather's tonic like I am. I'll come back when I'm wanted."

The door slammed and they were left in peace.

"What did you want to see me about, Mr. Littlejohn?"

"Just this, Mrs. Cottier. Do you know that Mrs. Norton, who was Mary Gawne in the old days, is staying on the Island at present; in fact, at Derbyhaven. She's been there for a couple of weeks."

"No! I never knew. And believe me or believe me not, if I'd known, I'd have told you before this. It's so long since . . . I wouldn't know her now."

"You knew she'd married again? She's Mrs. Nimrod Norton now. Has been for some years."

"I didn't know that either. I've never heard a word or put a sight on her since she came over with that Tramper man she married, just after the war."

"Funny. They must have been knocking around Castletown. And they presumably pass here every day they go far afield. They have a big saloon car."

"As God's my judge, I didn't know about it. Either her bein' here or married again. Did Tramper die?"

"Presumably. Hasn't Mrs. Christian seen them either?"

"She's not said nothin'. But then, she was in Ramsey till last Friday, where she was nursin' a sister of her late husband for a month. So it's not to be wondered at if she didn't see them."

Either her sister's absence or the power of the *Mixture* was making Mrs. Cottier much more bright and talkative.

"I suppose you two gentlemen will be comin' to Finlo's funeral. We'd take it as a favour if you would. There'll be a lot of people there, an' if they put a sight on the pair of you and know who you are, it'll look as if we're doin' our best about the murder."

"We'll come."

Knell looked a bit put-out. He was wondering whether or not he ought to wear a black suit, or uniform. If they went in black, he'd have to borrow one from his brother-in-law.

"I'd like to know a bit more detail about Mrs. Norton, or Tramper, or Gawne, or whatever she's been called from time to time. How did she meet Tramper, in the first place?"

Mrs. Cottier thought for a minute.

"He was a commercial traveller who did the rounds of the Island. He used to stay in Castletown from time to time. Mary was in a shop and Tramper called there sellin' his things. Smallwares, I think it was. Any rate, he was a no-good sort. Hardly a penny to bless himself with. His landlady told me that. Had to borrow from 'er till his firm sent him out some money."

"Yet, when you saw them after the war, they seemed nicely-off, you said. Fur coat, and all that."

"Yes. They set-up in business after they married. Liverpool way, I believe."

"Who provided the money for the business? Tramper was hard-up. Had Mary any money of her own?"

"Not that I'd know. But then, of course, it was before I properly knew Finlo and his family. Don't you think you'd better ask Mary if she's at Derbyhaven? She's the only one who'll know now. All the rest are dead and gone."

She sniffed back her tears.

"Are you comin' to the inquest?"

"I think not. It will be adjourned, unless there's an open verdict. We know the details of the case and we're rather busy. The coroner will let us know all about it."

There was then an interruption in the shape of a small, battered car which drew up at the front door. A heavy man in blue overalls with a grey jacket over them and a bowler hat topping the lot, descended. He had a heavy red face, heavy boots, and a heavy gait. In fact, everything about him was heavy.

"It's Walter. Finlo's nephew. What's *he* want?"

The door opened and the newcomer started to talk before he saw the policemen.

"'Ello, 'ello, 'ello! Just passin', so I thought I'd jest pop in and put a sight on ye, Mrs. Cottier, and ask if you wanted any 'elp. Oh. . . . Didn't know you'd got visitors. 'Ope I'm not in the way."

They were then joined by Walter's young son, who had returned from delivering his first batch of funeral invitations.

"Take yer cap off," said Walter sharply to his offspring.

"Ten letters at twopence hal' penny," said young Fred, as though his parent hadn't spoken.

"I just called to see if you're takin' Uncle Finlo in chapel before the cemetery. We ought to, you know."

"We'll be going," said Littlejohn.

"Don't let me intrude."

It was obvious that once they'd left, Walter would start throwing his weight about as nearest relative.

"Well, that's not yielded much," said Knell as they stood outside on the promenade again.

"We know now that there was money from somewhere when Mary Gawne and Mr. Tramper married and started in business. Neither of them had much. Did they get it from Finlo Crennell, who, after all, must have owed Mary a debt for landing her with an illegitimate child? Or did he think he'd done his share when he adopted Nancy?"

They trudged back along the road to Castletown, the road which had become so familiar that the people of shops and houses on the way now greeted them or waved a friendly hand, as if they'd known Littlejohn and Knell all their lives.

A coaster was tied-up at the basin as they reached the waterfront; a Ramsey boat which brought coal from the mainland. The new harbourmaster was standing talking to the captain; the customs officer was smoking at the door of the customs-house; the custodian of the castle in his trim uniform had come to the gate for a breath of fresh air. Life was going on in its easy, pleasant way, just as it presumably had done for Finlo Crennell when he was there. Two lorries were taking on barrels of beer at the brewery on the quayside; a large bus came to a halt at the swing-bridge and turned about, because the bridge wouldn't bear its weight. Two children fed the swans in the river. Just the same as always.

"If you'll go and wait for me at the police station and go through the letters and find what the local men have done about them, I'll just slip along to Mr. Morrison's down Malew Street. He once owned a yacht called the *Manninagh* in which Cribbin seemed to take an interest, judging from a note in his diary. I'd like a bit of the history of that ship."

Littlejohn strolled through the pleasant main square again and in the direction of where he'd been told Morrison lived. A big house off Malew Street.

He had never quite so much as now appreciated the style of the property, large and small, of Castletown. Here it was, when the little town had been the administrative capital of the Island and the castle the governor's residence, that the garrisons, the officials, the remittance-men from the mainland had lived. And they had built their houses in the styles of home. Rows of neat Georgian terrace-houses, with stuccoed fronts, oblong sash-windows, neat panelled doors and fine porticos, bright brass knockers, and iron railings to their basements or small gardens. More pretentious small mansions, with walled gardens, pillared porches, well-proportioned and, in their prime, opulent-looking. They were like the familiar rows and blocks of Chelsea, which might even have been their prototypes, nostalgically transplanted by exiles two hundred years or more ago.

After asking for the house from a pork butcher who was chasing a dog from his shop, Littlejohn at last found himself at the heavy double gates of the Morrison home.

*Framley Lodge*. The very name had a homesick sound. The place was certainly more than a hundred years old and probably had once been called something else. It was nearly a hundred years since Trollope had written of

Framley, and perhaps some official newcomer or his wife had renamed the house to remind them of England, Barchester, Hoggstock and the rest.

A large, square, double-fronted house, with a pillared doorway, a long sweep of drive, a flight of stone steps to the front door, and fine old chestnut trees hiding it from the road. The lawns and flower-beds were well-kept and the fabric of the stuccoed building well-painted and in good repair. Littlejohn tugged the brass bell-pull and waited. An elderly maid opened the door and eyed him suspiciously.

"Yes?"

"Is Mr. Morrison at home? Chief Inspector Littlejohn."

He handed her his card.

"Come in. I'll see. . . ."

Littlejohn stood waiting in the large hall. It was like going back a century in time. To Trollope, in fact. Heavy prosperous furniture, thick luxurious red carpet, two portraits in oils of men who might have been wealthy bankers, and a wide staircase mounting in a graceful curve with a delicate handrail.

Morrison didn't send the maid to bring in Littlejohn; he came himself. He wore a suit of heavy grey Manx tweed and red leather carpet-slippers. He had a curved pipe between his teeth.

"Good morning, Inspector. So you've kept your promise to call. Come in. Coffee's just ready."

He put a hand on Littlejohn's shoulder and piloted him into a room on the left.

This was the library, a large panelled room with books filling three-quarters of the walls on three sides. Books which, by the looks of them, weren't read much, bound in calf and in uniform bunches. Books of the past, old histories, complete sets of novels, theologies, encyclopædias. But on the shelf which topped the book-case at eye level for a man of Littlejohn's build, stood an array of china figures, colourful and exquisite, scores of them. Bow, Staffordshire, Chelsea, Worcester, Meissen. They gave the heavy room a touch of feminine lightness and charm.

At one end, a large open grate with logs burning. Over the mantelpiece a very fine pair of Regency ormolu and glass wall-lights, and a bracket clock which was a collector's piece. A neat early eighteenth-century eight-light chandelier, converted to electric current, hung from the ceiling in the middle of the room. A deep carpet, a set of sturdy Queen Anne chairs with

needlework panels in bright colours. The whole place held an atmosphere of wealth, good taste, and well-being.

There were two armchairs in front of the fire and between them, an invalid chair.

"This is my wife. . . ."

Littlejohn understood the china, the tapestries, the air of expert arrangement of the place when he saw Mrs. Morrison.

A frail shadow of one who once had been very beautiful. The bone formation of the features, the high fine nose, the large dark eyes, the forehead, all told of early loveliness, and the hands, now almost transparent, were long, slender and graceful in movement.

"You must forgive me. I'm tied to my chair, you see . . . ."

The gentle voice, the tired look about the eyes, the blue lips, the gentle resignation in the way she held herself, told of some deep, perhaps deadly illness against which she was bravely holding out.

Morrison hovered round her, all his aggressiveness of the day before at the *Dandy Rig* gone.

"I was just admiring, out of the corner of my eye, your fine collection of china, Mrs. Morrison."

"My collection. I can't lay claim to that. It was my sister, Louise, who gathered it all here long before she died. I'm afraid she spent nearly all her patrimony running about the country and the Continent in search of fine pieces. All I can do is cherish and protect it."

Her glance turned to a portrait in oils on the wall to the left. A beautiful woman in a late Victorian evening gown, who looked somewhat as Mrs. Morrison herself must have done in her prime.

"And the name of your house . . . Framley. . . ?"

"Yes. Trollope, of course. *Aunt* Louise this time. The house used to be called Ballagorry. Uncle Harry came over here as government secretary and he and Aunt Louise bought this place. It was the time Trollope was writing. They had no children and my parents were dead. I came later to live with them and they left me the house."

She began to breathe with difficulty. It was obvious the past was very dear to her and she grew excited as she spoke of it.

"You see, Belle, you're tiring yourself. Just rest. . . ."

Morrison spoke gently and solicitously, his own tired eyes watching his wife's every movement.

"She only comes down for two hours a day. She soon tires, don't you? When the spring comes back . . ."

His voice trailed away as though he knew there would never be another spring.

The elderly maid entered with coffee for the men and milk for Mrs. Morrison. Morrison himself continued to puff at his cold pipe.

"If you care to smoke, Inspector. . . ."

"No, Belle. I'm sure the Inspector won't mind. It's not good for you with smoke around. I'll put my own pipe away and then it won't tempt him. It's empty, you know."

"Please don't trouble about me, Mr. Morrison. I've smoked enough for one morning."

They drank their coffee.

"Is this an official visit, Inspector?"

"Semi-official, sir. You're sure Mrs. Morrison won't be upset? It can very well wait."

"I can't wait. I'm all agog, Inspector, to know what it's all about. Every time my husband goes out, I can hardly contain myself waiting for his return with news of the town and the Island."

"You've heard, then, that the husband of Crennell's daughter, Cribbin, was found murdered last night in Druidale?"

"Yes. A shocking business. What's to happen to his wife and children? Is there to be some fund to raise money for them, because if . . . ?"

Morrison looked at his wife.

"Yes. We must help."

"It may come to that later, sir, but now we're anxious to know all about Cribbin and his associates. The crime *must* be connected with Crennell's death and one solution may cover both. First, may I ask if Crennell worked for you long?"

"Yes. My father owned two boats here and I inherited them. From the age of fourteen, Crennell was on one or the other of our ships, the *Lothan*. . . . Manx for Northern Lights . . . and the *Lhondoo* . . . Manx for Blackbird. He ended up as first-mate and then took on the job of harbourmaster here. A very decent, god-fearing, charitable man of whom everyone speaks nothing but good."

"He also served in the *Manninagh*?"

Husband and wife exchanged strange looks.



"What do you know of the *Manninagh*, Littlejohn?"

Morrison sounded annoyed, as though some secret had been probed.

"There was, among Crennell's papers, a photograph, which, I think, was taken at Cannes in 1929, with you, Crennell and others beside the *Manninagh*."

"Yes. Her maiden trip. She was my yacht."

"A present from his wife. . . ."

As she interjected it, there was a note of profound sadness in Mrs. Morrison's voice.

"That's all over, Belle. We said we'd never . . ."

"The Inspector wants to know all about the *Manninagh*, dear. You must tell him."

Morrison passed his hand across his face as though trying to wipe something into forgetfulness.

"She went down at Dunkirk. A direct hit and she was seen no more. All aboard were lost, including our younger son. Now you know. . . ."

Utter silence. The bracket clock ticked away the minutes. Morrison shook himself.

"The picture you saw was taken on her first trip. Crennell was skipper. A tout on the quay took the photograph. It was a good one."

Littlejohn hesitated before the next question. Then he made up his mind.

"How would Cribbin be interested in that trip, sir?"

Morrison turned to him with a jerk and a puzzled look in the dark eyes, which were a shade too close together.

"Cribbin? What, the man who was murdered? I don't know. Why?"

"Because, in a note-book we found in Cribbin's pocket after his death, was written *Manninagh*, 1929. There must be some connection."

Silence again, as though each were waiting for the other to speak.

Again the quiet voice of Mrs. Morrison.

"You might as well tell the Inspector, dear. He'll find out sooner or later. Scotland Yard always do."

"Oh, well. It won't do any good to the case. It can't do. I suppose Cribbin must have been nosing into past history, or something. Who told him, I don't know. Perhaps it was Crennell. After the maiden trip we got home in early November. A lovely voyage. It might have been June. We put in at Castletown and, naturally, there were high jinks, everybody in holiday

mood, including ourselves and the crew, because she was such a lovely ship and we were safe home after a splendid run."

He told it slowly, almost reluctantly, but his wife's eyes on him made him keep on.

"Somebody brought cases of champagne. We had a little party on board. Crennell's wife wouldn't come. She was very strait-laced and I think she anticipated some kind of Bacchanalia with the wine. Her sister went with Crennell instead. Mary was wilder than her sister . . . much wilder. *She* didn't mind champagne. She drank quite a lot. Too much, in fact. So did Crennell. I think he did it to spite his wife for not coming. We left Finlo and Mary on board, alone. He was tidying up. The champagne and the excitement. They must have. . . ."

Mrs. Morrison seemed relentless now.

"Cribbin must have heard about it from someone. Hence the date. About nine months after, Nancy Gawne was born. That is all."

Morrison gathered up the coffee cups and put them back on the tray.

"So, you see, it couldn't have to do with the crimes. Cribbin probably just made a note of it."

"Yes. That's right, sir. It settles that point. I'm very grateful to you both for the explanation. By the way, did you know that Mary Gawne, now Mrs. Nimrod Norton, is on the Island again, staying with her husband at the *Dandy Rig* in Derbyhaven?"

"Yes, we knew. We haven't met her. She has forgotten all her old friends in the town. I think I saw her pass with her husband in their car. I wouldn't have known her. She's changed."

Yes, she had changed. From the high-spirited, adventurous girl who led the steady Finlo Crennell into mischief, into the quiet, cowed wife of the Big Shot, Nimrod Norton.

Littlejohn rose.

"I mustn't disturb you further, Mrs. Morrison. Thank you for your hospitality and for clearing up a little obscure point. I trust you'll soon be well again."

"I'm glad you came. It isn't often we get a real Scotland Yard Inspector here in Castletown. I read a lot of detective stories when I'm resting in bed. You are not like many of the detectives I meet in my books. Not ferocious enough. Too philosophic, if I may say so. A man who understands the tears of things."

Morrison laughed uneasily.

"Come, Belle. You're getting sentimental. Don't embarrass Littlejohn. . . ."

"I'm not doing that. He will find the solution all the same."

He left her, sitting patiently, her hands in her lap, waiting to be taken back to bed.

As he stood with Morrison in the hall, a car drew up to the door, a key turned in the lock, and a crowd of newcomers entered. A woman in a fur coat, holding by the hands a boy and a girl, twins by the look of them, and aged around four or five.

"My daughter, Barbara, and my grandchildren, twins . . . William and Louise. Shake hands with the Inspector, my dears.

"My daughter is over on a holiday. She lives in Salisbury. Her husband is a canon there. The Reverend William Grebe-Smith."

A fine blooming woman in her thirties, with all the grace of her mother. Tall, dark and very beautiful, as her mother must have been.

They shook hands and passed a casual word, and then Morrison saw Littlejohn to the gate.

"Come again, Littlejohn, when you feel like it. I think my wife enjoys your company. A real, live detective. She's lonely these days. Don't forget."

Littlejohn walked slowly back to the police station. The lovely face of Barbara Grebe-Smith, wife of the canon of Salisbury, haunted him. He wondered where he had seen her before.

## NIGHT

MONDAY drew to a close. None of the day's events seemed to bring the detectives any nearer a solution of the two crimes. The High Bailiff of the Island, sitting in his capacity as Coroner for Inquests, adjourned the inquiry on Finlo Crennell and expressed his intention of holding a similar one next day in the case of Charlie Cribbin.

There was no more news from Scotland Yard about the Dutch angle of the case. When Littlejohn and Knell called at the *Dandy Rig* for lunch, the place was deserted. Nimrod Norton and his wife had taken Mrs. Cottier and Mrs. Christian to Kirk Michael to see Nancy and her family about arrangements for Charlie's inquest and the funeral which they hoped to hold at Ballaugh Old Church on the Wednesday afternoon.

The undertaker had claimed the body of Finlo Crennell.

It seemed that the curtain had fallen completely. Every one of the main actors had vanished from the scene, and the body as well.

Then one of the constables arrived with some news. Charlie Cribbin had been in Castletown on the night, at the very time Finlo Crennell had met his death. He had called in at the *Trafalgar Inn*, a fisherman's pub in the town, and stayed there until nine o'clock. The landlord, his wife, and several other customers had confirmed this. He had left, saying he must be getting home, just as the nine o'clock news was coming on.

Other bobbies, who had scoured the town for any hints of happenings on the night of the murder of Crennell, or on the chance of anyone having seen Finlo or Charlie around, had drawn a blank.

After lunch, Littlejohn felt the need of thinking things over, of trying to assemble in some kind of intelligent pattern the bits of odd information which had come his way in the brief course of his inquiries. He therefore left Knell in Castletown and drove back to Grenaby himself.

In the quietness of Archdeacon Kinrade's study, Littlejohn turned over the strange facts of the case, telling the parson of them, making notes on the back of an old envelope, talking as if to himself. It was mild outside, a soft day, and they even sat with the window open. Hardly a sound, but the

rushing of the water under the bridge, the footsteps of a passer-by occasionally, a stray gunshot now and then, the rhythmic sound of Joe Henn, in his rambling house by the river, sawing and chopping-up a tree which had fallen. . . .

Finlo Crennell had a thousand pounds in his pocket, recently drawn from his Post Office account, when the *Rijswijk* picked him up. Practically all the money he had in the world.

Charlie Cribbin was bankrupt, ready to be sold-up, owing money all over the place. He needed a thousand pounds to put him straight. Was he going to borrow it from Crennell?

"It's very likely Finlo would have given it to him. A most kindly and Christian man. I've known him nearly all his life. He was always religious."

From his own brief knowledge of Crennell, albeit the Manxman was not himself at the time, Littlejohn felt that the vicar's commentary was right.

Yet, Crennell had seduced his sister-in-law who lived under his own roof. Or, as Morrison had put it, after a jollification, on board the *Manninagh*. It was, somehow, quite out of character, although there was no telling what Crennell might have been like after a night of champagne drinking.

And his wife had apparently agreed to accept the situation. They had more or less adopted Mary's child, to the extent that she had run away with Tramper and left her sister and Finlo to bring up Nancy.

Charlie Cribbin. What about Charlie? Had he known Finlo was coming home to Castletown on Saturday night and turned up to claim the money Finlo had promised him before the *Rijswijk* carried him off? Or had Charlie known that his wife was sole residuary legatee under her father's will and that the money would be absolutely theirs when the old man died?

What had happened on the *Manninagh* years ago, just before Nancy Gawne had been born. Was Charlie Cribbin's note simply a reminder of his wife's history, or was it more significant?

The Big Shot, Nimrod Norton, too. He had married Mary Tramper, nee Gawne. He'd said he knew all her past history. Did he? He might know of the illegitimate Nancy, of the runaway affair with Tramper, and a lot more besides. But from all accounts, Mary and Tramper were almost penniless when they married, and soon after, suddenly blossomed out in business, running a car, Mary in a flashy fur coat. Who had provided the money? Was it Crennell, and where had he got it from?

"You know the Morrisons of Castletown, sir? I called there this morning."

The parson nodded.

"Yes. A very old family, with origins on the mainland, I believe. Very wealthy, but all their wealth hasn't been able to restore Mrs. Morrison to health. A charming woman, always. And one to whom death might come any time. Her heart is very bad and she's quite unable to walk. Their daughter married a very nice fellow, a canon of the church. Salisbury, I think. And their son is an Oxford don. A very clever boy . . . a classical scholar. Mrs. Morrison is very dear to them all. She has been the centre of the family and I don't know what Morrison will do when she dies. They are very attached."

"A shipowner, I believe."

"Used to be, until he sold his ships and retired to look after his wife. A family of shipowners for generations."

"Do you remember his yacht, the *Manninagh*, sir?"

"Yes, vaguely. He spent a lot of time on her in the old days. She was lost at Dunkirk with the second son aboard. A great tragedy in their lives and one which I'm afraid has hastened Mrs. Morrison's end."

Maggie Keggin brought in tea and they were still discussing the case. Over and over again, the same points, the same obscurity.

Why did Charlie Cribbin make the trip to Castletown? Had he called for his money and had Crennell, in his disordered state, proved awkward? But Cribbin was hardly the kind to turn out armed with a heavy army pistol and use it on his benefactor. And who had caught Charlie unawares in the old house and shot him with a similar, or the same, weapon? Did Charlie know something about his wife's past or about Mary Gawne, which hadn't been generally known? If so. . . . Nimrod Norton. . . . Littlejohn kept coming back to the volatile, ill-tempered, slant-eyed Norton. What was he doing in the Isle of Man at all? He didn't look ill, and yet he said he was there for his health. As soon as Norton had arrived, things had started to happen. Crennell knocked out on the quay, wandering about in London, back to the Island again and then . . . a shot in the brain. And Charlie Cribbin had been next on the list. Both of them closely connected with Nancy.

"I'll have to tackle Norton and his wife and get a full account of their affairs. Norton keeps bullying and dodging the issue. And I must talk to

Mrs. Cottier, too. The picture isn't clear in my mind. There are gaps in Crennell's makeup I just don't understand."

"You'll leave it till to-morrow, Littlejohn?"

The parson was wanting a night of slippers and pipes in front of the fire. Pity to disappoint him.

"I'm afraid not, sir. I'd better be getting back. The funeral to-morrow will upset things. I'll stay in Castletown overnight. I'm anxious to get the atmosphere of the place. Crennell met his death in those narrow, dark streets. I want to see them for myself. Where shall I stay? I'll be back in the morning, sir."

Archdeacon Kinrade sighed. He was eager to join in the chase, and here was Littlejohn . . .

"The *Governor's Arms* in the main square. I'll ring up for a room if you like."

Yes; they could let Littlejohn have a front room at the *Governor's Arms*. One evening only? The landlord didn't seem very enthusiastic about it. All the same, seeing that it was the Archdeacon. . . . Would the gentleman want dinner?

Littlejohn put on his hat and coat. He'd have preferred a night in the company of his ripe old friend, by the fireside with a glass of grog apiece, but the confusion of the notes he'd taken, the cross-trails which didn't seem to lead anywhere . . . He felt he couldn't rest until he saw the way clear.

The Chief Inspector drove back to Castletown along the old familiar road. Dusk was falling and there was a change of wind which boded no good for the weather. As he topped the rise and the sea came in view, Littlejohn could see the shortening visibility, the low woolly clouds rolling in. Another night of damp and mist. Even as the thought entered his head, the fog-horn at Langness started to bleat.

The *Governor's Arms* stood in the Market Place, a solid, stone-built hotel, with a large doorway and iron balconies outside the front bedrooms. There was hardly a soul about as he took his bag indoors. The landlord wore flannels and a suède windjammer jacket and was drinking at the bar with a man who looked like a commercial traveller. After Littlejohn had signed the register the landlord grew more interested. He'd expected a parson. *New Scotland Yard*. . . . He hastened to take the Inspector's luggage and carried it up to his bedroom. On the way they passed a woman with a small child in her arms. There was a perambulator in the hall.

The room felt cold as though long unoccupied. The landlord, a tall, thin, heavily-moustached man of middle age, asked him if he'd like a fire, or a hot-water bottle in the bed. All in a dull, detached voice, as though his mind were on football pools, smuggling, or the bottles in the bar instead of innkeeping. He switched on an electric fire and left Littlejohn to his own devices.

The fire died away almost as soon as the landlord had turned his back and Littlejohn had to put another shilling in the slot to bring it back to life. A large double bed with brass knobs, a wash-basin with running water, notices on the walls . . . *Times of Meals* . . . *No Washing Clothes in Bedrooms*. In the room above a baby started to cry.

Littlejohn went down to the bar and ordered a whisky to warm him up. The commercial traveller had gone and the landlord was alone with his wife, a chubby little woman with hennaed hair, who, judging from the photographs on the walls, had been somehow or other connected with the stage. Portraits of variety artists autographed in stupid, gushing terms. *All my love to Gertie, Gus. To my charming Gert, with loving wishes, from Carol. Memories of never-to-be-forgotten days with Gertie, Love from Linda*. . . . Love by the bucketful!

"My wife used to be on the halls. . . . Ever heard of the *Spider Lady*? Contortionist. That's 'er."

Funny in what strange places people fetched-up. Here in Castletown was the woman Littlejohn had seen years ago at the *Holborn*. Under a green light, walking on all-fours like a crab, with her limbs tied in knots. Now she was so solid she could hardly move.

"You here on the Crennell murder?"

"Yes. Helping the local police."

"What could anybody want to kill a harmless chap like him for? We've been here three years. Came over from London for my health . . . thinkin' of going back in spring. Too quiet for us. I was sayin', Crennell was a harmless old buffer. The landlord at the *Jolly Deemster's* a friend of mine. Crennell used to go there for his pint every night, regular as clockwork. Sometimes he'd make up a four at cards. But a quiet and kind sort of chap. Beats me. You'll want dinner. . . . Seven o'clock, say?"

"Right."

Everywhere the same. Even comparative strangers thought well of Finlo Crennell. Littlejohn put on his hat and coat again, turned up his collar,



and went into the square. The weather had changed completely. A soft sea mist was billowing about; you could almost feel it touch your face. Visibility about ten yards and the beams of the headlights of the police car met it and returned to dazzle you. Moisture gathered in small globules on Littlejohn's coat.

Knell was patiently waiting at the police station. No more news. Littlejohn handed over the car and told Knell to get home and have a change.

"Take your wife to the pictures, or something. You deserve a break."

"That's a good idea, sir. There's a good crime picture on."

That would be a change! Swift action, rough-houses and shooting, instead of patiently plodding along in this quiet old-world little town.

Littlejohn telephoned to the *Dandy Rig*. Norton wasn't yet back. He'd told the landlord there that he and his wife would be in for dinner. That was all.

The castle clock struck six. Outside, the town lights were on, confused, intermittent lamps in the mist. The fog-horn sounded, somewhere a bus started up, whined in low gear, and then sped away.

Everybody seemed to be indoors for the evening meal. Not a movement or a sound in the Market Square or the little streets surrounding it. Far away, on the by-pass road, the faint muffled noise of passing cars, brakes, horns; but that seemed another world.

Littlejohn made his way to the swing bridge, crossed it, and walked swiftly towards the promenade where Mrs. Christian lived. Her house was in darkness, the only one with windows not illuminated. Across the water on Langness, the faint halo of the lighthouse in-and-out through the mist. Overhead a sea-bird flew in the dark and cried.

Nothing to do but wait. Past the lighted windows, back to the bridge, across, and along the quayside. The tide was in and the river high. Littlejohn could make out the masts of a ship tied up in the basin. Lights aboard and muffled voices. Two lovers leaning over the parapet of the bridge, watching the water, their arms about each other. The sort of thing Finlo Crennell must have seen every night on his way for his evening pint and his game of solo or nap.

There were lights on at the *Jolly Deemster*. Littlejohn turned-in, ordered another whisky and took it to a seat by the fire. His feet were cold.

"Evenin', sir."

The landlord was a ruddy, stocky man who'd first seen Castletown on a holiday and taken a fancy to it. A man from the mainland who probably, now and then, met the landlord from the *Governor's Arms* for a good grouse.

"You the Inspector from across on the Crennell case?"

"Yes."

"Bloody shame, that! Never knew a nicer, better behaved customer than Finlo."

He pointed to a table in one corner under a wall-lamp made to look like a candle in a candlestick, melted wax and all. The place was old, but it had been done-up, with fake oak beams, modern lighting, and an up-to-date bar and little tables with basket chairs here and there. Renovation for summer visitors had probably swept away all the old character of a fisherman's pub. Now, Crennell and his friends would find themselves a bit out of their element there, but kept on coming from old custom.

"See that table there? Till his first accident, Finlo was there from eight till ten nearly every night. Four or five of them met. You see the old chairs? They didn't like the modern ones, so we kept that lot for them when we improved the room. They'd play cards or dominoes, have a talk and a drink, and then break-up at closing-time. It's not the same without Finlo. Two pints he'd drink; that's all. A good steady man, who paid his corner and wished nobody any 'arm."

"His old friends still gather here? They'll be here tonight?"

"Yes. Certain to be here. It's the funeral to-morrow and they'll be making arrangements for the wreath and for carrying the coffin. You'll find them here after eight if you're this way."

Littlejohn drained his glass. Dinner time. He left and made his way to the *Governor's Arms*.

A scratch meal of cutlets, and peaches out of a tin, served by a waitress in a clean cap and apron, but with shoes the size of a man's. She hobbled to and fro with no idea of economy in movement; each dish separately, every one delivered with a smile.

And after the meal a few customers gathered in the bar. Tradesmen mostly. The butcher from down the street who seemed to spend half his days chasing dogs from his shop; the ironmonger Littlejohn had earlier seen setting-out paraffin heaters in his window; the man from the boot-shop in Arbory Street who passed so much time at his door in his alpaca jacket and

black apron. . . . They all peered in the dining-room at Littlejohn. News had quickly spread that he was staying in town.

Littlejohn felt a heavy blanket of damp depression, like the weather outside, descending on him. He went to find the telephone for his nightly call to his wife. It was in the hall outside the door of the dining-room and anybody in the bar could hear all that was said.

". . . I'll ring you up from Grenaby to-morrow and tell you all the news, Letty. I'm staying at an hotel in Castletown tonight. Oh, just for a bit of local colour. I'll report fully to-morrow. . . . "

He looked in the bar. Nobody was drinking, nobody speaking. They were like petrified dummies, listening to what he was saying, expecting to hear some vital point, some hint of an imminent arrest.

". . . The telephone's just by the bar, and they're all listening-in. . . . "

Feverish drinking, everybody trying to look as if he weren't eavesdropping, eager to start some conversation.

"Good-bye, Letty. I'll be back in Grenaby to-morrow night. . . . "

Littlejohn went straight out into the dark again. There were more people about. The lights of the cinema lit up a bright cave in the mist and darkness. A large church in the main street was dimly illuminated and the thin notes of a choir practising emerged. Past the Morrisons' house with a light in the front bedroom, another in the porch, and a third in the drawing-room. A car parked in the street by the gate. Not a soul about; not a sound.

Back in the Market Square, Littlejohn crossed and entered Queen Street, past Crennell's old home. The pavement grew rougher and rougher and filially ended by the open sea. Littlejohn remembered, it led to Scarlett Rocks, a beauty spot. The mist lay heavy ahead and he turned back.

In an old schoolroom along the street, the town band were rehearsing. *The Long Day Closes*. . . . The first two lines over and over again.

*No star is o'er the lake, its pale watch keeping,  
The moon is half awake, through grey mists creeping; . . .*

And then back to the beginning again. Very inappropriate for such a night!

And then Littlejohn looked at Crennell's old house and saw a gleam of light under the front door. Perhaps Mrs. Cottier was back. He tried the knob and the door opened with a gentle creak.

No light downstairs, except the single bare bulb in the hall, livened-up by a shade made of coloured glass beads. He softly made his way to the stairs and looked up. Someone was moving at the back, in Crennell's old room.

Littlejohn hesitated. Perhaps it was something in preparation for tomorrow's funeral . . . the grave-papers, some formality needed. And then he heard a man's voice, soft and gruff.

"Didn't he keep a diary or letters or anything?"

The Chief Inspector mounted the stairs softly, his shoes sinking in the carpet, and he was at the open door of Finlo Crennell's old room before the occupants knew he was there.

Mrs. Cottier was standing, her hands on her hips, watching a man rifling Finlo Crennell's seaman's chest. The man looked straight at the Inspector as he entered. It was Nimrod Norton and he sprang to his feet like someone stung.

"What do you want?"

"Might I ask the same question?"

"We've come for the grave-papers. This intrusion of yours is quite unwarranted. You've no right to come in like this."

Norton's neck was inflated like a tyre and purple with rage. Mrs. Cottier was obviously startled and, if they'd only been on a normal search, as Norton had said, she wouldn't have looked so guilty.

"Is that so, Mrs. Cottier?"

She didn't reply.

Littlejohn looked at Norton's hands. He was holding the bunch of papers containing marriage lines, Nancy's birth certificate, and Crennell's tickets as first and second mate.

"If it's the details of the *Manninagh* you're searching for, I have them. I took them when I went through the papers yesterday."

It was a random shot, but it hit Norton.

"What the hell do *you* want with them . . . ?"

And then he shut-up.

"So you *are* interested in them?"

"No. What do I know about the *Manninagh*? I don't know what you're talking about."

Mrs. Cottier was wringing her hands.

"That's what you came for, isn't it, Mrs. Cottier?"

"I don't rightly know, sir. Mr. Norton just asked me to let him see if there were any papers about Nancy."

"That's right. After all, Nancy's my wife's daughter, you know. It's only right the papers should go to her mother."

Norton had recovered himself now.

"But you surely don't need to come like a thief in the night to get them."

"I'll damn' well come when I like or how I like and you can't stop me. You're exceeding your duty. . . ."

Littlejohn took the papers from Norton's hand, put them back in the box, and closed the lid.

"What do you think you're doing? Those are mine . . . or rather, my wife's."

"They belong to the executors and are the lawyer's affair. And now, sir, I want to speak to you, to your wife, and to Mrs. Cottier. Shall we do it here in the cold house, at the *Dandy Rig*, where it's warm, or at the police station?"

Norton controlled himself with difficulty.

"It's late. I won't have my wife disturbed. What's it all about?"

"I'll tell you when we get to the *Dandy Rig*. You have your car here, I presume?"

"Yes. It's parked in the square, but . . ."

"Then you can take Mrs. Cottier and me along with you. I want to ask you all some questions which are very important and they can't wait. It's that or the police station for you all. . . ."

"Oh, very well. But I shall complain about this. You've exceeded your duty, you know, and I'm not a man who . . ."

"Lead on, sir."

They put out the lights and locked up the house again.

The band were still practising.

*The moon is half awake, through grey mists creeping. . . .*

Littlejohn smiled to himself, but Norton didn't seem to hear. He was so annoyed that he almost broke into a run to keep ahead of Littlejohn.

## WHAT NORTON WANTED

NORTON drove the big car in silence, taking risks in his rage, hooting loudly round corners, forgetting or deliberately omitting to dip his headlights. Now and again, he grunted to himself, Over the swing-bridge, along the other side of the river, down the narrow streets to the seafront, and then along the promenade.

There was a light in Mrs. Christian's cottage.

"Stop here, please, Mr. Norton. I'll talk to Mrs. Cottier inside and you can drive on to Derbyhaven. I'll walk and join you there . . . I won't be long."

"You can take your time. I haven't had a meal yet. But then, I don't matter, do I?"

Norton didn't even wait until the door of the house opened, but drove on without another word.

Once inside, Mrs. Cottier started to weep.

"I don't know where this will all end, Mr. Littlejohn. I suppose I'll get in trouble now for lettin' Mr. Norton in the house an' lettin' him put a sight on Finlo's private papers."

Mrs. Christian listened impatiently. Her huge bulk filled the doorway between the living-room and the kitchen.

"Don't be so silly. Nobody's goin' to harm you. Pull yourself together."

"Nobody's going to harm you, Mrs. Cottier. But I'd like to know how you came to take Mr. Norton to the house in Queen Street and what he wanted."

Mrs. Cottier sniffed and then blew her nose in her handkerchief.

"You know he took us to see Nancy at Michael. . . . On the way back he said he'd like to see Finlo's papers, as he wanted to be sure that Nancy's birth certificate was safe."

"I tried to kick you in the car just to warn you not to do it. But you didn't take any notice."

Mrs. Christian made a kicking motion to emphasize her point. "Oh, that's what you were doin' it for, is it? You've made my shin black an' blue.

You needn't have . . . "

"What do you *think* I was doin' it for? Neither you nor Nimrod Norton has any business interferin' in Finlo's affairs. It's not legal. Is it, Mr. Littlejohn?"

Littlejohn thus given a chance of a word, tried to put an end to their wrangling.

"Perhaps you'll tell me what Mr. Norton wanted, Mrs. Cottier?"

"Yes. I told him he'd not to take anythin' away with him. And he said it was the birth certificate he was after, but it wasn't. It was somethin' else. The way he rummaged in the box made me think that. He was more interested in the photographs. . . ."

"Do you think it might have been earlier pictures of his wife he was after?"

"No. He just looked at them and threw them down. But it was the way he sort of eagerly turned them over and then looked a bit disappointed that struck me."

"He didn't say what he was after?"

"No; except the birth certificate, like I said."

"I wonder. . . ?"

Littlejohn took out the photograph of the *Manninagh* again. Crennell, another officer, and then Morrison, all standing in front of the yacht. And a man leaning over the rail, smiling, legs crossed. A young man, by the looks of him. . . .

With his pocket lens, the Chief Inspector examined the fourth figure. The mongolian features of one who might easily have been Nimrod Norton in 1929! Slim then and looking taller as a result. Now the Big Shot was fat, full, prosperous and heavy. But the picture showed the eyes and the same shallow skull.

Well, well. . . .

"I won't trouble you any further, Mrs. Cottier. My advice to you is to get to bed and rest. You've another busy day to-morrow."

"As if I could sleep! With all that 'orror in my mind. It's not safe to go to bed."

The way Mrs. Christian looked this time at her grandfather's *Mixture* in the bottle, she was going to make sure her sister slept, nightmare or no nightmare, murder or no murder!

Littlejohn strolled along the seafront to Derbyhaven. The mist was thick in parts and in others thinned out as the breeze caught it. King William's College loomed in the darkness, lights in the study windows. The beacons of the airport glowed dull red. Here and there the road was clear and he could see a star or two. The tide was ebbing when he reached Derbyhaven. Clusters of lights, the navigation lamps on the breakwater, the rhythmic flashes of Langness lighthouse. . . .

The *Dandy Rig* was busy. A group of men holding a reunion of some kind; they seemed to be singing a school song as Littlejohn entered. Norton and his wife were in a small private room. There was a table set with cold supper. One place was laid and untouched; somebody had made a good meal at another. Mr. Norton in spite of his remarks earlier had turned-down his food.

"I'm too upset. I can't eat. You seem to have done pretty well, though."

He was annoyed that his wife should need food and eat it when he was in trouble himself.

"You said I could . . ."

"I didn't mean you to eat a banquet while I was out. You might have waited. I shan't have any supper now. And we're packing up and going home, too. I'm fed up with this lot. If you want to stop over for Charlie Cribbin's funeral, you can go yourself. I'm off to-morrow."

And that was why Littlejohn found an electric atmosphere when he joined the Nortons.

Mr. Norton greeted him discourteously.

"I suppose you've had a meal. Well, I haven't. If you want to talk, you'll have to do it while I eat mine."

Mrs. Norton's jaw fell as her husband sat down to his cold chicken and, seizing a wing in his fingers, started to gnaw it as if he were starving.

"Ring the bell and ask them to bring me a whisky, Mary. That is, if they've time to attend to us. The row that lot are making in the other room's disgustin'."

He tore a roll of bread apart, buttered it, and thrust it in his mouth as if he hadn't seen food for a week.

"Well? You can sit down, can't you? I can't enjoy my food with you standing there like somethin' the cat's brought in. . . ."

Mr. Norton was going to defend himself by a rude attack.

"That's enough, Norton."



Nimrod Norton was just opening his mouth for another bite and it remained open for a brief moment. Food even fell from it. He wasn't used to being talked to like that.

"What the . . . ?"

"Listen, Mr. Norton. I don't mind talking to you as you eat and I don't mind standing as I do it, if you don't care to ask me to sit, but I won't tolerate offensiveness. Now I'll just ask you what I have in mind and then I'll leave you in peace."

Peace! The men next door were warming up and now were shouting their heads off singing community songs.

*My old man said follow the van,  
And don't dilly-dally on the way. . . .*

Mr. Norton's mongolian eyes seemed to be looking round for somebody fresh to murder.

"Here's your whisky, dear. Drink that and you'll feel better."

His wife seemed devoted to him in spite of it all.

"I *shan't* feel better. I'm properly upset. Well, what do you want? Let's get it over, Littlejohn."

Littlejohn took out the photograph of the *Manninagh* group and put it on the table beside Norton's plate.

"Was that what you were looking for at Crennell's place just now?"

At first Norton couldn't believe his eyes. His mouth was closed and full of food this time and his cheeks grew inflated as he struggled to keep his temper. He swallowed and then washed it down with a great gulp of whisky.

"What's this?"

It was obvious he knew what it was and was greatly disturbed by it.

"Why should I want this? I was after the birth certificate."

Mrs. Norton rose, went to her husband's side, looked at the photograph, and uttered a little terrified cry. Then she staggered and had to hold the table for support. Norton gave her a drink of his whisky.

Here, here, Mary. Don't take on so. It's only a picture. It's no concern of ours."

"You're included in the group, I see, Mr. Norton."

Norton thrust away his plate, leaned his elbow on the table, and glared at Littlejohn.

"What if I am? What's it got to do with you?"

"I'm anxious to know why you wanted the picture so badly that you were ready to steal it."

Norton was too angry now to hesitate or be prudent. He replied at once.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Nosey-Parker. I wanted to get it before you did. I didn't want a lot of questioning and humbug about my past life and how it was mixed-up with Crennell's. I came here for a rest, and what do I get?"

As if in answer to his question, a great burst of singing surged from the next room.

*Will ye no come back again. . . .*

"It seems, Mr. Norton, that I got there first. Suppose you tell me now what you were doing in the *Manninagh* group at Cannes in 1929."

Mr. Nimrod Norton closed his mouth tight and continued to glare.

"Mind your own business." He spat it out at length.

Mrs. Norton was obviously terrified. Littlejohn felt sorry for her. It was a fair bet that Mary Norton was becoming the centre of gravity of the case. . . . Mary Norton who had been so pretty and flighty in days gone by and was now middle-aged, faded, and at the end of her tether. The girl who had led Finlo Crennell astray after a champagne orgy and whose love affair of more than twenty years ago had now raised its head in tragedy and unhappiness.

"Tell him, Nim. It'll all come out and he might as well get to know from us as from others. It'll come better from us."

"No."

"For my sake, Nim."

"No."

Norton drank the rest of his whisky, rang the bell, and ordered another, without consulting Littlejohn about a drink for himself.

"I'll have to tell *you*, Mr. Norton, if you won't tell *me*."

Norton's neck grew inflated again, his slant eyes smouldered, and he turned and stood over Littlejohn as if ready to pick him up and throw him through the window, "What do *you* know about it?"

"First, you aren't here for your health at all. Your wife persuaded you to come over and look into the affairs of Charlie Cribbin who'd either written to her himself or got his wife to write for money. They were broke and asked you or Mrs. Norton to lend them some to carry on."

"I'm not saying you're right or wrong, but who's been talking behind my back? Was it *you*?"

He faced his wife.

"No. I didn't. . . . I've never spoken to Mr. Littlejohn without you being there, Nim. Honestly. . . ."

Norton seemed ready to have a fit. Looking round for something on which to vent his rage, he picked up the chicken leg he'd just cleaned, dashed it on the table, and broke a plate.

"We're leaving the Island to-morrow. I've had enough."

"I'd advise you not to do that just yet, sir. I've no power to prevent you, but if you try to move away, I shall be tempted to hold you on suspicion . . ."

"Suspicion of what? I didn't kill Crennell and you know it."

"I don't know it at all. You were on the Island when he disappeared the first time. You were still here when he met his death, and you were very near the scene of the crime on both occasions. You'd better stay on till weekend at least, or it will be worse for you."

"I shall book a 'plane back to the mainland as soon as I can. You're not going to stop me."

"I warn you, then. . . . I believe there was something in the nature of blackmail in Gribbin's demand for money. You came over here hot-foot after he wrote . . ."

Mrs. Norton was quick to answer.

"There were no threats, as God's my judge. After all, Nancy's my daughter and I'm very fond of her."

"You didn't seem so in the past when you ran away with Mr. Tramper and left her over here."

"That was long ago. My sister was alive then and was a better mother to her than I ever was. But with Nancy married, children, and nobody to turn to . . ."

"Except Crennell, who, judging from appearances, was ready to give her all he'd got to help her."

"I didn't know that . . ."

Norton started to wave his arms.

"I won't have my wife bullied."

"Nobody *is* bullying her. We seem to have got a long way from your connection with the *Manninagh*, Mr. Norton. If you'll explain that, I'll leave

you for the present. I want to get away as well, you know."

"If you won't tell him, Nim, I'll have to do it."

"Do as you like, but I'm not having him bullying either of us."

Mrs. Norton was pale and tense and wrung her hands as she spoke.

"The *Manninagh* was built at Castletown, in the basin there. There used to be quite a lot of shipbuilding. . . . Mr. Norton was a marine architect and engineer then. He gave it up later when he inherited his father's jewellery business. Mr. Morrison sent over for him and he was here supervising it all. He got to know me. He wanted me to marry him, then . . ."

Norton made a puffing noise and wiped the sweat from his forehead and round his neckband. He was actually embarrassed. The very thought of having to court a girl like anybody else seemed to bother him.

"They went on the first voyage together. That's how he came to be on the picture."

A silence. Littlejohn took out his pipe and lit it.

"Well?"

Mr. Norton was angry again.

"Well what? That's enough, isn't it?"

"I know the full story must be painful and embarrassing to you both, but I've got to have it. You left the Island and Mrs. Norton . . . then Miss Gawne . . . when you heard she was going to have Crennell's child?"

"Of course not. What do you take me for? If I'd known she was going to have a married man's kid, I'd have tried to be as generous about it as Finlo Crennell's wife was. have still asked her to marry me and brought up the kid like our own. Only she told me there was somebody else. I packed up the same day and went back to England. I married a year later and soon after I heard that Mary had had her child, and then she'd gone off with Tramper and married him. A right mess, if you ask me. And now are you satisfied, because I've said all I'm saying. . . .?"

Littlejohn began to think better of Nimrod Norton. Under the bluster and bullying, he was quite a decent chap. His wife was even looking proudly at him.

"I only married Tom Tramper because he was good to me. After the child was born it was uncomfortable for me here. I was trying to get a job across . . . Tramper was always good to me."

Norton's first wife had died, and Tramper had died, too. Then Norton had returned to his old love. And perhaps he'd got mixed up in the tangled web of Mary Gawne's past love affairs as well. Just as he and the woman Norton had seemed to love all his life had got together and comfortably settled again, along came Charlie Cribbin extorting money. And Norton had returned to the Island and two men had been murdered.

"Well . . . what are you brooding about? Don't you believe us?"

"Of course I believe you, Mr. Norton. But may I ask a question or two to clear the air? Mrs. Norton. . . . When you and Mr. Tramper got married, you set-up in business in Liverpool. . . ."

"Yes. She was running a little grocer's shop in Bootle when I found her. And it wouldn't have lasted long, either. It was on its last legs. Tramper was a no-good. It's no use you saying he wasn't, Mary. He was a lazy devil and left you all the work."

"He was always good to me."

"Well, I'm good to you, aren't I?"

"Of course you are. I don't . . ."

"Where did the money for the business come from, Mrs. Norton? Had you or Tramper any capital?"

"No. We borrowed it. Two thousand pounds. It was never paid back."

"From whom?"

Silence. Littlejohn waited. Then it came.

"Finlo lent it to me. He said he owed it to me for what . . . what had happened. I told him I was going away and couldn't stand it here any longer. He and my sister said they'd look after Nancy."

"Where did Crennell get the money from? He was only a sailor."

"Perhaps he'd saved it, or made a good investment . . . I don't know."

"Two thousand pounds! And Crennell a young sailor. It's incredible!"

"She says she can't tell you, doesn't she? What's the use of pressing the point, Littlejohn?"

"I was hoping she'd make a good guess, that was all."

Mary Norton looked as if she *could* make a good guess, too. She was afraid again.

"Let's change the subject, then. Did you see Cribbin before he was murdered?"

"No, I didn't. My wife went along a time or two. But I wanted to wait a bit and see Crennell first. As it was, Crennell vanished. That delayed things.

I think my wife lent Nancy a bit, but nowhere near what Cribbin wanted. He'd debts of getting on for a thousand pounds. A sum like that needs looking into, you know. I took my time. Then he got killed. . . ."

"Who killed him?"

"That's your business, not mine. I didn't. You'd better get that bee out of your bonnet. I didn't kill him. Why should I?"

"Do you possess a revolver of any kind?"

"I've one at the office. I keep valuables there and I got a permit. Why? It's in the safe over there now. I don't carry it about."

"Where were you last Saturday night, about nine o'clock?"

"I don't know. Where were we, Mary? And I don't like the way this questioning is going. I keep telling you, I'd nothing to do with the murders."

Mrs. Norton hadn't answered her husband's question. She was looking terrified again.

"Where were you at nine on Saturday?"

"I went to the pictures in Castletown with the landlady here. They weren't busy and it was a good picture."

"And Mr. Norton?"

"I stayed in. I'd some letters to write. I was in here all night."

"You took your wife and her friend to Castletown first to the cinema?"

"Do you think I let 'em walk on a night like that?"

"What time did you leave?"

"About seven, and then I came back here."

"And went to pick them up after the show?"

"Yes."

"What time?"

"Look here . . ."

"*What time?*"

"About ten."

"What time did you leave here?"

"Between nine and half-past."

"Did anybody see you?"

"I don't know."

"You went straight to the cinema?"

"Yes. I'd no wish to be messing around in that fog."

Norton had cooled down. It seemed he'd realized his position. No alibi and good reasons for hating Crennell and, if Cribbin were blackmailing

him, getting him out of the way, as well.

"Sunday morning. . . . Were you together?"

"No. My wife stayed in bed in the morning and I went for a run in the car. I didn't go to Druidale, if that's what you're after."

Littlejohn rose and took up his hat.

"Well, I'll leave you now, sir. And thank you for answering my questions. It's been very helpful, but you mustn't leave the Island until I say so. If you do, I shall have to take steps to detain you . . . or bring you back."

Mrs. Norton stood by her husband as he opened the door, eager to get Littlejohn off.

"We won't go, Mr. Littlejohn. We aren't afraid."

But Norton made no reply. There was probably quite a bit he was afraid of.

The merry party was breaking up, too.

*Should auld acquaintance be forgot. . . .*

"Good night."

A surly reply and no handshakes from Norton.

Littlejohn walked back. The mist had gone with a change in the wind. Lamps sparkled along the promenade and in the town. The College was almost in darkness. On the vast mass of the inland hills farmhouses here and there with tiny lights like stars. Somewhere a ship blew her siren.

The case was more confused than ever. The Nortons were obviously involved. Norton himself was blustering his way out; his wife was scared to death. The Big Shot was without alibis for both crimes. And yet, he didn't seem the sort who would murder a man in cold blood. In a fit of rage, yes, easily, if he'd a gun. Cribbin might have killed Crennell for his money. And then Norton might have killed Cribbin later for blackmailing him or his wife. But blackmail *what about?*

Littlejohn dismissed the problem from his mind, filled his pipe, and crossed the swing bridge into the town. There were a few people about coming from the cinema, a few local boys and girls courting under the trees of the market square. The pubs started to turn out. The customers of the large hotels in the square, the *George* and the *Governor's Arms*, emerged one by one and stood on the thresholds enjoying the last gossip of the day and saying good-night. Then, quietness. In the distance, the ebb tide dragging on the shingle, the faint cry of birds flying in the darkness. In one of the old houses of the square, someone was playing a piano. Littlejohn

even recognized the piece. The third *Consolation* of Liszt. It sounded strange, so far from sophistication in a small, neat, remote town silent under the stars.

Littlejohn turned in at the *Governor's Arms* and wrote a letter to his wife.

*I am as far away as ever from a solution. I have a feeling that so many people know exactly what happened, but are holding out on me, a stranger, a foreigner, who has no business to inquire or to know.*

*On my way to the hotel here, where I am staying overnight for convenience, I heard somebody playing one of Liszt's Consolations—the third, of which you and I are so fond, and playing it very well. The landlord says it is a woman who was a brilliant concert pianist on the mainland before the war. Her son was a fascist, was interned here, and died. Since then, she's lived here, visits his grave every day . . . quite mad.*

*I shall be glad to be back at our dear Grenaby with the Archdeacon to-morrow night. . . .*

At two in the morning, Littlejohn was awakened by the sound of a car starting from the square outside, and then footsteps and voices.

When he arrived down for breakfast as the castle clock was striking nine, they told him that Mrs. Morrison, of Framley Lodge, had died in the night.



## THE WANDERINGS OF CHARLIE CRIBBIN

THE morning of Finlo Crennell's funeral was mild and sunny and so the weather remained all day.

As Littlejohn walked over to the police station to pick up Knell, he could sense the atmosphere of constraint about the streets. Some of the houses had their blinds drawn and some of the men were knocking about in their best black suits ready for the funeral in the afternoon. News of Mrs. Morrison's death had already travelled round Castletown and half the Island and, in spite of the cheerful turn in the weather, a damper had descended over everybody. Nobody laughed or shouted and some even looked tempted to walk about on their tiptoes as a sign of grief and respect.

A man emerged from the shop of Corlett, the Shoe, with a pair of new black boots and in Qualtrough's, the drapers, a woman was trying on a black hat and they were wrapping up some black ribbon for her. By the time of the funeral, there would be black everywhere.

Knell was waiting for 'the Chief'. He greeted Littlejohn expectantly, as though the Chief Inspector might, on the previous night, have stumbled across a missing-link and solved the case right away.

"You know, of course, Mrs. Morrison's dead, sir?"

"Yes, Knell. That makes the round dozen times I've been told."

They got in the car and made for Grenaby.

"I want to see Nancy Cribbin to-day if we can manage it before the funeral. We'll take the Archdeacon with us. He'll like a trip, I know."

Littlejohn then went on to tell Knell of his escapades of the night before.

"I always thought Norton was a wrong-'un, chief. I wouldn't be surprised . . ."

Knell's face grew stern, a special official look he'd learned to assume in the old days when he'd served summonses.

The Archdeacon was answering a mass of correspondence when they arrived at the vicarage. He was using a quill pen, made from the feathers of Grenaby geese. He hurriedly packed up his papers and put on his hat and

coat when he heard of their mission. With admirable restraint he never asked Littlejohn how the case was going; so Littlejohn told him. No progress at all. . . .

"It's always the same. Then we stumble on something and the machinery starts to work."

"And you've not stumbled yet?"

"No."

It was one of those soft, island days again, the sort which fill you with gentle melancholy and make you want to abandon work and idle about. *Traa di Liooar*, as they say on the Island. . . . Time enough.

But Knell was neither melancholy nor slothful. He drove the car earnestly, his long nose like that of a dog on the trail, a curious look of anticipation on his face.

Difficult to believe it was autumn and the year dying. It reminded you of spring. The trees in the plantations above Foxdale looked ready to sprout and bud again, and the dead bracken and gorse of the fall seemed ripe for cutting down to reveal the new growth of grass underneath.

An indescribable sense of sadness filled Littlejohn as he looked down the valley from Foxdale. The village was still and, in the distance, a train was puffing out of St. John's station on its way to Peel, making a lot of steam and whistling cheekily. They passed great desolate slag-heaps and ruined engine-houses and warehouses, the relics of the lead and silver-mines and of Foxdale's prosperity before they all fell into decay and drove a whole population overseas for fresh work. Now the long rows of miners' cottages were occupied by a movable crowd of tenants who couldn't, through the shortage of homes, find a place elsewhere. An assorted conglomeration of people from all over the Island and the mainland.

After St. John's, they joined a T.T. road, where gangs of men were repairing the surface and trundling rollers and tar-boilers about. Names of places dear to the hearts of motor-cycle enthusiasts all over the world . . . Ballacraine Corner, Ballig Bridge, Creg Willys Hill . . . There were still faint traces on the surface of the roads, of the indication signs of past races, large red arrows urging the riders on.

The door was closed and the blinds down at the cottage of Charlie Cribbin's parents. It was as if they had shut themselves up with their grief and didn't want to be disturbed. Faces appeared at windows and heads turned as the police car drew up and the three occupants climbed out.

The constable from Ballaugh opened the door for them. He had called to see if there was anything he could do to help. In the garden behind the cottage, another bobby, this time the one from Kirk Michael, was talking to Charlie's father about potatoes. The old man was a keen gardener and the kindly policeman was trying to take his mind off his misfortune. They kept talking and then old Cribbin would pause and shed tears again.

"I keep forgettin' Charlie, as I talk about the priddahs. It doesn't seem right, does it? But I somehow can't think of him all the time."

A pity, because these were good people and Charlie Cribbin had been up to no good when he got himself killed.

Quayle, the Ballaugh policeman, a heavy, kindly man with a large red face and a sandy moustache, was a bit abashed to find himself in the middle of the Scotland Yard squad.

"You know, sir, that the doctor said Charlie Cribbin died on Sunday mornin' . . ."

"Yes. And we know he was in Castletown after nine o'clock on Saturday night. He didn't go home from there. Where was he in the meantime?"

"He stayed here with his mother and father till early Sunday mornin', sir. I've asked them."

The three policemen had the room to themselves. Upstairs, the dressmaker was measuring old Mrs. Cribbin for a mourning costume and Nancy was with her. The Vicar's wife had taken the children to the vicarage. Outside, Kelly, the Kirk Michael bobby, was still trying to take old Cribbin's mind off his troubles by talking to him about vegetables.

The blinds of the room were drawn and Littlejohn could make out dim objects in the shadows and just see the homely features of P.C. Quayle.

". . . His father said the fog was a bit thick here and Charlie called and said he'd better stop the night and go home in the mornin'. The road up to Druidale's bad in foggy weather."

"And Charlie left the following morning. What time?"

"Around nine, sir."

"Did he seem in any way excited or disturbed?"

"They said he seemed just himself. But then Charlie was never much of a one for showin' his feelin's. Rather a cool sort of fellah, he was, as a rule."

"Mrs. Cribbin says Charlie travelled by bus on the Saturday he went away. How did he get to Castletown? It's a long way, isn't it?"

"It is, sir. He left home about one in the afternoon. I asked Mrs. Cribbin about it all, thinkin' you'd want to know. He most likely walked into Ballaugh and as like as not, got a lift from someborry into Douglas. Plenty of people go to Douglas from these parts on a Saturday. I've been inquiren', but up to now I've not found out who took him."

"And from Douglas, he'd take a bus for Castletown, of course."

"As likely as not. . . ."

"What was he after in Castletown?"

Quayle scratched his head, took out his notebook, and went to the window, where he drew back the blind to let in a bit of light and then studied his notes with intense concentration.

"I couldn't ezzackly say, sir. But my theory is, he went to meet Finlo Crennell as was comin' back home with you, sir."

A silence as this profound deduction was digested.

"Good, Quayle. Good."

The bobby cleared his throat by way of acknowledging Littlejohn's approval.

". . . Yes, sir. You see, word came through to Mrs. Cribbin that her dad had been found in London, and that you, sir, were bringin' him back to the Island on Saturday's boat."

"How did word come through?"

"It seems Mrs. Cottier had been warned beforehand, leck, so's she could meet the boat in. She knew how put-out Nancy was since her dad vanished, so she asked the Castletown police to let Nancy know what had happened, if they could, leck. Castletown phoned me and I phoned Ballafarrane Farm, which is next to Charlie Cribbin's, to pass on the news, which they did, because I asked them over the phone this mornin'. . . ."

"Splendid."

Quayle again acknowledged the compliment by a nervous cough. A country bobby, with his little parish to look after, was Quayle, but he had his wits about him.

Littlejohn clapped him on the shoulder.

"Very good," he said again.

"Aw. . . ."

Quayle was a bit shy, but in bed that night, he treated his wife to a full account of his collaboration with Scotland Yard and she fell asleep half-way

through it. Thus do the wives of the clever and the great prevent their becoming too proud or too pleased with themselves. However . . .

"So we have the reason for Charlie's trip to Castletown and the likely way he got there? Now; how did he get back?"

"On the back of Sammy Joughin's motor-bike, sir. Charlie told his dad that, when he got them out of bed at turned eleven o'clock to say he'd better sleep here on account of the weather. Charlie said he'd been to Douglas on business. He didn't mention Castletown. Now, Sammy Joughin's courtin' a girl whose mother keeps a boardin'house in Douglas. Sammy lives in Orrisdale, just down the road there. I had a word with him, sir. It seems that just after ten, Charlie Cribbin met Sammy near the car-park in Douglas and asked him for a lift. I guess he'd come in from Castletown by bus, or thumbed a lift to Douglas. Then, he hung about the road by the car-park, on the off-chance of someborry from this way bein' able to give him a ride. . . . He was lucky. Otherwise, he'd have had to take the last bus to Peel and walk home from Ballacraigne . . . six miles or more to Michael. . . ."

"That's very well tied-up, indeed, and I appreciate the intelligent way you've anticipated our inquiries. Just one more thing. Charlie left here at nine on Sunday morning. How did he get to the house at Montpellier in time to be killed at eleven, which the autopsy mentions as around the time of death?"

"He got another lift from this very door. Mr. Kneale from Michael is on the *plan beg* and was on his way in his motor car to preach at Ramsey. He dropped Charlie at Ballaugh at half-past nine or a little before. Charlie must have walked the rest to Montpellier. . . ."

"What's the *plan beg*, by the way?"

Archdeacon Kinrade, a silent listener, chuckled in his beard.

"The *plan beg*, Littlejohn, is the Methodist rota of Sunday preachers. The *plan beg* covers the laymen's programme, the *plan mooar* the ministers'. The *begs* are the little men; the *mooars* the great ones, the parsons. . . ."

Upstairs, the fittings seemed over. Sounds of feet and whispering; and then a little woman bustled down the stairs. Her mouth was full of pins and she carried a tape-measure. The pins and measure she placed in a box on the table.

"Excuse me," she twittered and went off without another word.

More footsteps and Nancy Cribbin appeared. Even in the half-light of the darkened room, Littlejohn could see a change in her. Her dark eyes seemed to have grown larger and there was a droop in her carriage which had, until this tragedy, been straight and proud.

"Mother's just lyin' down a bit. All this has been too much for her. Perhaps you'd like a word with her, Mr. Kinrade. I'm sure it'll comfort her."

"Of course."

The gaiters and the firm step of the old man receded up the narrow staircase and then his kindly voice above, bringing the old woman the solace she badly needed.

Nancy faced the three police officers.

"Did you want me, Mr. Littlejohn?"

"Do you feel up to answering one or two questions, Mrs. Cribbin? The sooner we know these things, the quicker we can act."

"I'll try."

She didn't sit down, but held herself tensely, standing on the rug before the dim fire.

Outside, in the garden, another crony had joined the bobby from Michael and old Cribbin. The newcomer seemed to be administering Job's comfort, for Charlie's father was weeping openly into his handkerchief.

"Do you mind, Mrs. Cribbin, if I'm quite candid in my questions? Inspector Knell and Constable Quayle know all about it, and, though what I ask might be painful, we shall keep our own counsel about your replies."

"I'll do my best."

That in a timid voice as though some horror were forthcoming, like a death-sentence from a doctor.

"Your husband was in a poor way financially, I believe."

A pause. Nancy Cribbin didn't even ask Littlejohn how he knew. She answered honestly.

"We were nearly bankrupt. For two winters we've lost a lot of sheep and the farm didn't turn out to be what they said it was when Charlie took it over. It didn't pay."

"Did your late husband ask anyone for financial help, Mrs. Cribbin?"

Silence again for a moment.

"Yes. He asked the bank, but he'd no security to offer. In fact, they asked him to pay off the little he owed them."

"So, he turned to other people? To Mr. Crennell, for instance, and then to Mr. or Mrs. Nimrod Norton?"

"Yes. He asked my father. Dad said he'd only a thousand in all the world, but Charlie could have it. Dad said it would be mine one day and, with his pension, he'd manage without it."

"But a thousand wasn't enough, was it?"

"No. We owed that. Charlie talked about gettin' more capital for machinery to run the farm. I wasn't keen. I wanted us to leave Druidale for the children's sake. It's no place to bring up little children in. I wanted Charlie to start afresh on a farm that would pay him for all the work he put in it."

"But Charlie wanted to stay on at Druidale?"

"Yes, sir. He was a stubborn sort of man and said he'd never let the land beat him."

"So he wrote to Mrs. Norton, as well."

"Yes."

"What was the result?"

"They both came over. My mother came up to see us. She said Mr. Norton was a keen business man and wouldn't invest money in a proposal that wouldn't yield profits. Mr. Norton said he'd come and see the place but he never did. . . . "

"So, that looked like being a forlorn hope, too."

"Yes. My mother said she hadn't enough of her own to help us. She said that she had some invested, but couldn't get at it without Mr. Norton knowin' of it. She said he was a good husband . . . none better . . . but he'd never allow her to put her money in anythin' he didn't approve of."

"And what had your husband to say to that, Mrs. Cribbin?"

Another silence. And then Nancy Cribbin spoke in a quiet, baffled voice, higher in pitch, as though there was something she couldn't understand.

"Charlie seemed cheerful in spite of it all. For a while he was depressed about things, specially after the bank wrote for their money back. Then, he got more cheerful. After I told him what my mother said about borrowing from her or Mr. Norton, he just smiled. 'A mean trick,' he said, 'after the way she treated you . . . illegitimate and deserted, like, when young. But I've still a few ideas, a few ideas up my sleeve . . . . ' "

"And he didn't hint what they might be?"

"Not a hint."

"Do you remember anything which might have happened to change your husband's humour . . . make him optimistic?"

"No, sir."

"When did his good humour date from?"

"I wouldn't really know, sir. Come to think of it, I'd say it was about from the time of my mother's first visit . . . say a fortnight ago. She came up to see us the day after her and Mr. Norton crossed to the Island."

"And Mr. Cribbin bucked-up after that visit?"

"I'd say so, yes."

"Did he alk with your mother about his money problems then?"

"No. I don't recollect it. She just told us then that Mr. Norton was lookin' into things and he was a keen business man."

"Thanks, Mrs. Cribbin. We won't bother you any more just now. Are you going to your father's funeral?"

"No, sir. It'll be mostly men and I don't really feel I can face it all on top of what's happened."

Littlejohn looked at her lovely face, the jet hair, the large dark eyes, and the fine formation of her features. A strange proud creature indeed to originate in a drunken orgy between a sailor and his own sister-in-law. And then to fetch-up in a desolate hill farm, married to a loutish farmer, who left her in isolation to tend her children and the stock, whilst he took strange outings to the other side of the Island.

Old Mr. Cribbin returned with his escort from the garden. He greeted the visitors listlessly.

"I can't understand anybody murderin' our Charlie. It beats me. He wouldn't hurt a fly, our Charlie. Always a good boy. . . ."

The parson came down and talked quietly to the old man and then joined Littlejohn and Knell for the trip back. They lunched at the vicarage. Somebody had sent the Archdeacon a brace of pheasants from the mainland. Maggie Keggin had made a good lunch of them, but the party was too preoccupied to do it full justice.

"Seein' that there's none of 'em on the Island and we on'y get a pair every year, ye might have done 'em more justice," said the housekeeper as she cleared the dishes. "However, ye best know yourselves. If you want indigestion by thinkin' an' workin' as you're eatin', the three of ye, that's your own business, not mine. . . ."



And she served them a huge apple tart, cream, and Manx cheese.

The three of them were in Castletown for the funeral just before two. It was like a mournful half-holiday in the little town. Shops closed for the time-being; men walking about in dead black; long, sad faces everywhere; flags half-mast, for Finlo Crennell was on the official list.

There were over a hundred present, mostly men. There was to be a service at the house in Queen Street before the cortège started and so many people arrived that they overflowed into the street and completely blocked it. A huge mass of men with earnest honest faces, puzzled by the way Crennell had died, almost afraid. The women were onlookers on the fringe, mere walkers-on in the drama unfolding itself. The grim men were the ones who mattered and if the murderer was among their number, his heart must have beaten fast with fear, for as the rites progressed, their anger seemed to grow. They made way for Knell and Littlejohn, gave them friendly nods, trying to encourage them in the work they had to do.

The coffin was brought out and placed on trestles before Finlo Crennell's door and the great choir of rugged seamen and the workers of the town, among whom the familiar faces of several island dignitaries appeared, sang Finlo's favourite hymn.

It took Littlejohn by surprise in its simplicity; it was almost infantile, but it reminded him deeply of the humble, smiling man he'd brought home to meet his death only a few days ago.

*All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small. . . .*

The sentiments of a simple, unsophisticated sailor, almost a child in many ways. And, long ago, he'd got drunk, seduced his sister-in-law, and set in motion the wheels of the drama which was ending in to-day's tragic curtain. For Littlejohn was sure the crimes were the long overdue payments of accounts of twenty years since.

The Methodist parson and the Archdeacon stood side by side as four of Finlo Crennell's former card-playing buddies from the *Jolly Deemster* hoisted the coffin and slid it in the hearse.

There were only four vehicles and the hearse. Three taxis for the family and the clergy and following them, the antiquated trap of a cousin of

Finlo's, a farmer from Ronague, whose old car had broken down and who had unearthed this relic and hitched his milkhorse to it. The rest formed up behind the trap, two-by-two, and thus they walked the miles to Malew church.

Littlejohn and Knell found themselves in the middle of the long double queue, shuffling slowly, like conscripts, on the long straight road past Great Meadow to the graveyard. Tramp, tramp, tramp . . . and the whine of cars in low gear adding a monotonous marching tune.

Four of Finlo Crennell's old pals, men who'd worked in the shipyard in the palmy days, had got the time half an hour late and had to perform a steady solemn trot to catch up with the rest.

At first they all started to march bareheaded, but a thin breeze sprang up and, one by one, the old men, and then the younger ones, put on their hats again. Billycocks, peaked sailor caps, soft felts, cloth caps and, in the middle of the lot, the yachting cap of a dandy who was a bit wrong in his head. . . .

The horse in the cousin's trap was used to delivering milk from door to door in Ballabeg and kept halting now and then, as it was accustomed to do every day except Sundays. Then, urged on by its owner, it would break into a canter, outrun the procession, and have to be brought in line again.

At length, they arrived at Malew, a plain, graceful whitewashed church surrounded by old graves, and the interment began. Littlejohn looked at the vast gathering massed among the headstones. Dignified islanders, men who lived by their work on the sea and the soil, men intimate with nature, whose integrity had enriched their small native land. There was a dog there, too. Somebody had brought it because Crennell had once risked his life in climbing down the cliffs to rescue it and had then found it a home with friends.

"I thought he'd like to think of it bein' here. . . ."

There was another burst of loud, harmonious singing, the moving committal they gave to all their men who lived by the sea, the Manx Fisherman's Hymn. It was a rite of the most solemn kind.

The droning voices of the parsons; the frozen funereal looks on the lined, tanned faces of the elderly; and the red cheeks of the young, making any odd pale face look even paler. The thud of earth on the coffin.

They all stood about when it was over. Some blew their noses and mopped their eyes; some stamped the ground to warm their feet. Then

somebody shook Littlejohn by the hand and said that Finlo Crennell was one of the best, a good man. It was like an injunction, an unspoken command to avenge him. The incident started an epidemic of handshaking and soon Littlejohn was surrounded by men stretching out hands, seizing his own, wringing it, passing it on to the next in line.

After it all, Littlejohn felt he knew Crennell even better. As though he'd lived with him in Castletown, followed him about the town, even joined the four at cards every night.

A good fellow, Finlo Crennell. One of the best, who wouldn't do anybody a dirty trick. And yet . . .

Littlejohn remembered the wife with whom Finlo was now sharing a grave which the gravediggers were already filling with earth. It was said by those who professed to know, that after Nancy had been born and the married pair had agreed to adopt her . . . the child of the husband and his wife's sister, Ethel Crennell had hardly spoken to him again for the rest of her days.

AFTER the funeral, they found more news waiting for them at Castletown police station. Scotland Yard had telephoned information about the *Rijswijk*. She was on her way to Douglas with another cargo of timber and Van Dam was in command.

The owners of the *Rijswijk* hadn't wasted much time. They were anxious to have her turned round and off to earn more dividends. They had engaged a good lawyer, who had made mincemeat of the charge of murder against Van Dam. He'd been employed by the same firm for twenty years, a sailor of industry, reliable, impeccable record. There was no proof of a quarrel or a scuffle between Van Dam and Leeuwens, who, in the absence of witnesses, might easily be said to have fallen off his ship and bashed his head against the quayside and drowned. As for Finlo Crennell's wallet—Van Dam had made a clean breast of it all. Until Crennell left the boat in London, Van Dam was keeping it safely for him. Leeuwens knew it and approved. The police in their zeal hadn't even given Van Dam time to turn in the money and explain about it. The magistrate had found no case and released Van Dam, who, having his master's ticket, had been given Leeuwens' job.

"So the *Rijswijk* will soon be back, Knell?"

"If she hasn't already docked. She sailed Sunday afternoon. She was fully loaded and all that was wanted was the release of Van Dam. She should soon be here."

They rang up the harbourmaster's office at Douglas. The Dutch boat was due to dock at seven that evening and was well on her way in the Channel.

"It might do no harm to have a word with Van Dam. He might throw some light on things. Perhaps being so long with Crennell after they'd picked him up. . . . We'll go to Douglas first thing in the morning. . . ."

"One thing's quite sure, sir. Van Dam has an alibi for when Charlie Cribbin died. Even if he lied about Crennell's trip on the *Rijswijk*, Van Dam couldn't have anything to do with Cribbin's murder."

But the pair of them were in Douglas before next morning. Haunted or not, things always seemed to be happening in the night at Grenaby.

Littlejohn and the Archdeacon spent the evening together. To clear Littlejohn's mind of the confused case, he and the parson played chess after dinner. Archdeacon Kinrade gave Littlejohn a good beating and then opened a bottle of port to restore his spirits.

"Do you think Finlo Crennell was murdered for something he did, or for something he knew, Littlejohn? It must have been one or the other."

Littlejohn knocked out his pipe on the bars of the fire and refilled it. The clock in the hall slowly struck eleven and the telephone bell took up where the clock left off. Littlejohn hurried to answer it before it awoke Mrs. Keggin who was in bed.

It was Knell, almost breathless with excitement.

"We've got Van Dam here in custody, sir. Drunk and disorderly; striking an officer; resisting arrest; found on enclosed premises. . . ."

"Anything else, Knell? He seems to have wanted to be quite sure of a night in the cells."

"I thought I'd better let you know right away. Knowing I was on the *Rijswijk* case, they sent for me. I was spending a quiet hour or two at home with my wife. We're expecting a new-comer in the spring, sir. . . ."

It only needed that! Knell expecting to become a father on top of the two murders and a fracas with Van Dam!

"I'm very glad to hear it, old chap. . . ."

Old Chap! You could hear Knell swelling with pride at the other end of the line. He wanted to ask Littlejohn to be the infant's godfather, but the time was hardly suitable. As it was, Knell had worked the news in over the telephone because he'd been hitherto too shy to mention it face to face.

"If it's a boy we're going to call him Thomas after you, sir."

Littlejohn wanted to laugh, although he was sure with a serious man like Knell, who was probably scared to death about it all, it was hardly a laughing matter. But it reminded him of two knockabout comedians pattering in front of a drop-cloth behind which the stage is being set for a tremendous melodrama. Crennell, Cribbin, and now Van Dam, and here they were choosing the name for Knell's firstborn! Littlejohn felt he wanted to continue the conversation. Why not call him Caesar, after the good Archdeacon, or even Finlo, after the big case which Knell was going to solve whilst the baby was on the way?

"Sorry, sir. But I'm a bit excited about it . . . . "

"It'll be an honour to call him Thomas, Knell. For me, I mean. We might even come to the Christening, if we're invited."

"Whatever it is, sir, we both want you and Mrs. Littlejohn to be godfather and godmother. . . . But I'm wasting your time, sir. Can you come to Douglas and see Van Dam? He can't speak good English, but we've got a Dutchman here, a waiter in one of the hotels, who's a good interpreter."

"But do you need me? It's only a drunk case, isn't it?"

"There are peculiar circumstances, sir. He was meeting somebody secretly on the *Victoria*, a deserted Steam Packet boat tied up on the Tongue, as we call it here, in the river."

"Did they get the other fellow?"

"No, sir. The constable who found them had his lantern kicked out, there was a scuffle in the dark, and the other man got away. The officer managed to hang on to Van Dam, who even bit him on the calf in the dark. . . . "

"Good Heavens! This seems to have been an exceptionally colourful encounter. All right. I'll come. But you'll have to pick me up. It's too late to walk all the way."

"Oh, we wouldn't expect you to do that, sir."

Knell's voice was pained and serious.

". . . I'll be over in about half an hour, sir."

The parson was already putting on his boots.

"May I come, too? A night ride always does me good."

"Of course, sir. But it's just a case of drunk and disorderly. Van Dam, the master of the *Rijswijk*, has been painting Douglas red, it seems. Drunk, biting policemen, breaking into laid-up ships, resisting arrest. . . . And on top of it all and in the midst of the *melée*, Knell informs me that he's soon to become a father and the boy—if any—is to be called Thomas. What do you think of that, parson?"

"Splendid! When do we start?"

"Knell's coming for us. He's on his way."

The Archdeacon rubbed his hands.

"Splendid! Splendid! You'll be over in the spring . . . or will it be Christmas?"

"Spring."

"Wonderful! The primroses and the gorse will be out . . . and the bluebells everywhere. Grenaby will be a picture. . . . I'm so glad."

It must have been the port which made the pair of them frivolous.

"Good old Knell!"

"Yes. Good old Knell!"

The door slowly opened and an apparition appeared in the doorway. Another Grenaby ghost! Maggie Keggin, her hair in curling-pins, her dressing-gown hiding most of a nightdress which almost reached her feet and was tightly laced at the throat with blue ribbon, a cap on her head, and a candle in her hand. She eyed the two men with tight-lipped disfavour.

"I'll get some black coffee before you go out. I heard the telephone. It always means you're goin' off gallivantin' in the night. You're in no condition, either of you, for others to see. Two grown men! One a parson who ought to know better, and the other a celebrated detective who ought to be an example of sobriety to his men. You've finished that bottle of port, I expect. . . ."

She vanished without a smile and they heard her grinding fresh coffee at her little mill. They looked like two boys caught in mischief and struggling still to retain their seriousness.

When Knell arrived they were on their second cup of black coffee.

Knell was a bit sheepish after letting out his secret. They gave him some coffee laced with rum, assuring Maggie Keggin that it wasn't for them and that it was raw outside.

"Besides, Knell's expecting to become a father soon."

Mrs. Keggin didn't move a muscle of her face.

"That's nothin' new. I've had three and my sister in Ballakilpheric has had eleven. All the same, it'll be good for ye, Mr. Knell. It'll keep ye steady and off the drink."

And she gave the Archdeacon and Littlejohn a reproachful look, gathered up the dirty cups, and vanished silently like a wraith.

"I'll leave a thermos of coffee for ye when ye return, but I've hidden the rum."

At Douglas police station they found Van Dam had grown quiet. In fact, he was in a melancholy mood and tearful. By his side in the charge-room stood a little fair man in a raincoat with a full waiter's rig-out underneath it. A crafty-looking fellow who had been pestering the sergeant about his fee for acting as interpreter.

"It ought to be, ad least, seffen shillinks and sigspence the hour. . . ."

They told him to shut-up and get on with translating Van Dam's lamentations.

Littlejohn and Knell joined the party.

"How did it all start, sergeant?"

Sergeant Quaggin looked completely befogged. Things had been moving too fast for his liking and he'd had enough for one night. He longed to get home and get his boots off, for his corns were giving him jip.

"Send Corris in and be quick about it," he said to his attendant constable.

P.C. Corris appeared and limped to the desk. He glared at Van Dam, whose teeth had earlier met in the calf of his leg, which an enthusiastic member of the first-aid squad had just bound up as competently as if the Dutchman had bitten off the limb entirely.

"Tell the Chief Inspector what happened, Corris."

P.C. Corris opened his notebook, cleared his throat, and told his tale.

He was patrolling the quayside and had seen what looked like a glimmer from a flashlamp on board the *Victoria*. It shone dimly through one of the portholes . . .

Thereupon Knell interrupted to explain that the *Victoria* was an old Steam Packet boat used for summer services. A good ship still, of a little over 1600 tons. In winter, she was tied-up at the Tongue, a long stone pier built at the head of the upper harbour and which formed a little dock there and divided it from the river.

. . . The light was shining dimly in one of the cabins and P.C. Corris had climbed aboard the *Victoria* to investigate. He had heard voices but on making in their direction, must have disturbed the intruders, for the light had suddenly gone out. He had then switched-on his own lamp and for a moment lit-up two men crouching in one of the doorways. One of them had sprung at him, extinguished the light, and tried to get away. P.C. Corris had hung on, finished-up struggling on the lower deck in the dark, getting his leg bitten but clinging to his quarry like grim death. Meanwhile, the other interloper had skedaddled for all he was worth. Corris had finally succeeded in sitting on his antagonist's chest and recovering enough breath to blow his whistle.

Van Dam addressed a string of mumbling to the waiter.

"What's he say?" said Quaggin.



"He wants to know what it's all about."

Another exchange of conversation in Dutch.

"What's he say?"

"He says it's not true. He was on the ship alone looking round. He says he's interested in ships and was . . ."

"Tell him to tell it to the Marines."

"Beg pardon . . ."

"Never mind. Say we don't believe him and he'd better say what he was after on the *Victoria* and who was with him."

More unintelligible exchanges.

"What's he say?"

"He, says he wasn't drunk and that he'd only had a few drinks. He's sorry he trespassed on the boat but he was interested in her. She is a lovely boat."

"Oh, tell him to . . ."

More muttering.

"He says he wants a lawyer."

"He's got a hope at this time o' night. He's stayin' in the cells here. What's he say?"

"He says he must get back to his ship. He's master of her and has orders to give."

Littlejohn intervened.

"Could I have a word? Being an outsider, perhaps I could get a bit more violent with him."

He seized Van Dam by the collar and hauled him to his feet.

"You speak English, don't you? Don't you?"

The Dutchman was powerful but the shaking Littlejohn gave him made his teeth chatter.

More Dutch.

"What's he say?"

"You'll soon know."

And he shook Van Dam again until his knees started to give way. "Now, speak English, Van Dam, and no more nonsense. You've been travelling to and from England and the Island for years. Don't tell me you haven't learned English. . . ."

"A liddle."

"I thought so. From your looks I could see you understood all we said to your friend here. Now talk, if you don't want a few days in the cells."

"I mus' get to my shib. . . ."

"Not till you've talked a lot."

They sent the waiter home, still pestering about the amount of his fee.

Bit by bit, Van Dam told the story they'd already heard from the Dutch police. It tallied almost exactly.

"How was it that when the men on the quayside, who heard Crennell fall in the harbour, though they couldn't see him, called out to you, you didn't answer them and say you'd got Crennell with you safe and sound?"

"Captain Leeuwens said to be silent. They would otherwise have called us to put back. We were late. Captain Leeuwens wanted to get home to port."

"Was Crennell unconscious when you picked him up?"

"Pardon."

"Was Crennell insensible?"

"Yes. He had been hit on the head."

"How do you know he'd been hit on the head? He might have struck his head as he fell."

They had to put the question in several different ways before its meaning sank in Van Dam's mind. Finally, the Archdeacon addressed him in German. Van Dam almost embraced him. He knew German moderately well, and what he didn't know sounded like Dutch. He was sure from the nature of the blow that Crennell had been hit on the head and pitched in the water.

"What's he say?"

They told the sergeant, who wrote it down.

Then about the rendezvous aboard the *Victoria*. Van Dam started to lament and shed tears as the Archdeacon's sonorous German reached his understanding.

"He says this is his first ship and he's disgusted at his bad luck. He insists he merely went on board to look her over."

"And P.C. Corris says there were two of them. We believe P.C. Corris, sir."

It was difficult for Littlejohn to put Van Dam through a mild third-degree with a parson as interpreter, but the Venerable Archdeacon was as dogged as the police.

"What's he say?"

"He says he admits he met a man there, but he doesn't know his name. When his ship docked here, somebody rang up the dock office and asked for him. It was somebody who had rung up two or three times before to inquire about the arrival of the *Rijswijk*. Van Dam says they told him that at the dock office. He spoke to the man who telephoned and was told he must meet him secretly on private business. The rendezvous was aboard the *Victoria*. . . ."

"What was the business?"

"He didn't know. They were disturbed before they got down to it."

Littlejohn turned to P.C. Corris.

"Did the other man join in the fray, constable?"

"Yes, sir. I had the pair of them on me. I'd both in my grip till this Dutchman bit me. Then I let the other fella go."

"Did you hit him first?"

Corris's solemn face creased into a self-satisfied smile.

"Once with my truncheon, and the other with my fist. I think he'll have a nice lump, sir, and a black eye."

"Very good. Has Van Dam been searched, sergeant?"

"Just his pockets and his belt, sir. He'd a body-belt with some Dutch money in, that's all. Not much."

"Take him and strip him, then. See if he's any papers. He must have taken something else from Crennell, that our unknown friend seems badly to want."

Van Dam understood it without an interpreter. He started to shout the place down and demanded lawyers and consuls.

"Take him off and bring back his clothes for me to see before you dress him again."

"Very good, sir."

Van Dam was hustled out by three pairs of hands which almost lifted him from the ground in their enthusiasm. He struggled, held on to objects and projections in the room, and finally, lay on the floor. This assisted them in carrying him out. One by one his clothes were passed in to Littlejohn, who went carefully through them, pockets, linings, seams. . . . Jacket, jersey, trousers, underwear which badly needed the laundry. . . .

"Nothing more?"

"No, sir."

"There's nothing here. What about the belt?"

The sergeant produced it.

"He shouted so much for his belt, that we made him do without it because he used bad language . . . or that's what it sounded like, judging from the way he said it, although I don't know Dutch myself."

A canvas affair with two leather pockets attached and a leather tongue and buckle. Littlejohn held it and felt it. Then he took out his pen-knife and slit the leather binding which held the two strips of canvas together. He inserted his thumb and forefinger in the cavity, drew out something, held it up to the light, and grunted.

Then he took up the evening paper which one of the policemen had been reading, spread it on the table, and shook the belt over it. The noise sounded like a lot of shots being emptied from a cartridge.

But they weren't shots. About forty diamonds, mostly decent-sized stones, sparkled among the newsprint.

"Well, I'll be damned!" said the sergeant. And then he begged the Archdeacon's pardon.

THEY spent another hour with Van Dam after that.

In English and German and with innumerable more "What's he says?", Archdeacon Kinrade, after infinite patience and kindness, got a tale of sorts from the Dutchman.

At first, Van Dam pretended he was as surprised as the police at what had been found in his belt. Littlejohn had to intervene now and then to give him another good shaking. True, there are Judges' Rules which forbid the manhandling of witnesses, but, after all, Van Dam pretended over and over again he was falling asleep.

Finally, he said Captain Leeuwens had asked him to take care of Crennell's diamonds for him. . . .

Crennell's diamonds!

"Yes. I took care of the banknotes, didn't I? But I couldn't get those in my belt. So I hid them in my cabin. The diamonds I put in my belt for safety."

Of course, he was going to turn them up! He was an honest sailor!

Van Dam was a medium-built fat man, but as they questioned him, his flesh seemed somehow to grow flabby and in the end he sagged completely, guilt written all over him. His usually cunning eyes had grown shifty and glazed.

"You know we shall have to check this. If the diamonds were actually Crennell's, you'll avoid a charge of smuggling. Otherwise . . ."

Van Dam seemed to be talking to himself in the mixture of languages which only the vicar of Grenaby understood.

"He says you've proof of his honesty in the fact that he brought the stones back to the Isle of Man with him. He intended handing them over to Crennell's relatives."

"That remains to be seen. He'd better stay in custody overnight, at least. With the burden of complicated charges upon him, we can do no other."

Littlejohn turned to Sergeant Quaggin.

"I'm really only concerned with the murders of Crennell and Cribbin and I'll have to leave Van Dam in your hands. If I were you, however, I'd see the Dutch police were kept informed about this affair. The discovery of the stones might throw quite a new light on the murder of the former skipper of the *Rijswijk*. You'll sort things out with your Chief in the morning and if I can help, let me know. Thanks for your co-operation."

The diamonds were locked in the police-station safe; they all said good-night, and Van Dam was conducted to his cell.

Outside, the town of Douglas was clear and quiet. Lamps shone in the empty streets and, above the silence of the night, they could hear the sea beating on the shore. The lights glowed on the quays and the midnight cargo boat having left, these too were deserted. In the harbour near the Tongue, the large shadowy bulk of the *Victoria* loomed against the background of Douglas Head. Knell had left them and gone to his home at the top of the town. Littlejohn and the Archdeacon were the only ones about. The car slid over the old bridge and on its way to Grenaby.

Littlejohn had been thoughtful since leaving the police station.

"Do you mind if we try an experiment, Archdeacon?"

"I don't mind a bit. What's the time?"

"Nearly two. I want to call at the *Dandy Rig*. It's a bit of a risk and there'll be trouble if it doesn't come off. But I must see Norton right away. He's one of the suspects of to-night's escapades. If we give him time to recover his composure, we might never know. It's now or never."

"I'm game, if you are."

There was a moon about somewhere, but the clouds obscured it. Instead, a soft white light diffused itself over the landscape. Trees, farms, the distant hills, the undulating white road were all visible. Now and then, they could see the sea far away. Littlejohn was torn between driving slowly to enjoy the beauty of the night and putting on all speed to get quickly to Derbyhaven.

Not another vehicle on the roads, not a solitary light in the hamlets as they passed through. . . .

Through Ballasalla, where a couple of lamps lighted the road; past the darkened airport; then, in the distance, the glow in the sky over Castletown, where the great mass of the castle rose in the dark. Littlejohn turned left before the town and ran along the promenade to Derbyhaven.

The *Dandy Rig* was in total darkness. Lights on the breakwater and, far along the peninsula of Langness, on the green grass of which the first Derby was run before it went to England, the same solitary lamp glowed in the window of the large closed hotel. The beam of Langness lighthouse probed the night.

Littlejohn rang the door-bell. Now for it! There was no night porter. He could hear the purr of the bell somewhere in the direction of the kitchens. He pressed twice again before a light snapped on and shuffling footsteps sounded behind the door. Bolts, bars and the turning of a key. The manager appeared. He was in his pyjamas and dressing-gown, his hair dishevelled and bags under his eyes. He looked bewildered, like one suddenly roused from a baffling dream.

"Hullo! It's you, Inspector, isn't it? And the Archdeacon! Nothing wrong, I hope."

He stood aside to admit them, showed them into a small sitting-room, and jerked the lever of a slow-combustion fire to boost the dying embers.

"I'd like to see Mr. Norton at once, if you don't mind, Mr. Stocks. Sorry to disturb you, but it's urgent."

"That's all right as far as I'm concerned, but how Mr. Norton'll take it, I don't know. He's a bit of a terror, you know. I'll go and wake him."

"Just a minute, sir."

Mr. Stocks turned sharply and one of his down-at-heel carpet-slippers fell off. He grunted as he put it on again.

"Has Mr. Norton been out all night?"

"No, sir. He took his wife and mine to the local cinema again. Mrs. Norton's fond of the pictures. They got back about half-past nine. They went early and saw the show round and he met them. Then, while his missus and mine were having a nightcap together . . . a cup of tea . . . he said he'd go for a run again; the night was nice, he said. He got back here at half-past eleven. I had to wait up for him. I'd left the door loose and was sitting having a drink as I waited, when suddenly I heard him going up the stairs. I hurried out and he called good night from the landing. I didn't even see him. Where he'd been, I don't know. Perhaps called on somebody and been having a drink, too."

"Will you tell him I'd like to see him, then, please?"

They waited and could hear the vibration of the manager's feet on the landing above, then a discreet knocking, and, at last, a growling voice, more

vibrations, and the manager's timid muttering at the bedroom door.

Stocks was soon back, looking put-out.

"I said what it would be. He's hopping mad with me. He says he'll see you in hell before he'll come down at this time of night . . ."

Littlejohn himself was on the way upstairs before the manager had finished.

Room No. 1. The best in the place. That would be Norton's. Littlejohn knocked on the panels.

"Who is it? I tell you I'm not coming down at this hour, and in the morning, I'm off first thing to see the Chief Constable of the Island. I'll make that meddling fool from Scotland Yard look a bigger fool before I've finished with him."

The voice sounded strange. At once hollow, lugubrious and angry. Littlejohn suddenly realized that Mr. Norton was without his false teeth!

Littlejohn knocked again. He could hear Norton snorting and shouting, and his wife's timid voice, begging him to see what it was about and get it over. Like a climax in an opera, increasing in noise and violence.

"Don't upset yourself, Nim. Your blood pressure. . . ."

"Mr. Norton. I want to see you right away. Please come down at once to avoid any further fuss."

Littlejohn spoke like issuing an order.

Heavy, reverberating steps, and the key turned in the lock. Norton bolted inside again to insert his teeth, and then suddenly he looked bigger than ever in a large gown made of bath-towelling, the first garment he'd laid hands on. At first he could hardly speak for rage. Then:

"What the hell do you mean by this? And at this hour? Whatever it is can wait till to-morrow. I warn you, I intend to report this first thing in the morning. I'll have you removed from office. I'll . . ."

Littlejohn stretched out his hand and put on the landing light. Fully illuminated, Mr. Norton's face was the most unpleasant sight he'd seen for many a long day. He had a black eye and there was a cross of sticking plaster holding a pad of lint over the swollen spot near his crown where P.C. Corris's truncheon had smitten him in the dark. In addition, the Big Shot's other eye was half closed with sleep and the remaining fringe of his hair was dishevelled as though he'd recently been tearing at it.

"I think you'd better join us downstairs, sir. I've just come from speaking to Captain Van Dam. He's spending the night in gaol in Douglas."



Without another word, Norton closed the bedroom door behind him and thudded his way down the stairs and into the little room below. He started to vent his spleen on Stocks.

"What are you doing here, hanging about? This is private, so you can get along to bed. You'd no business disturbing me at this hour. We're leaving to-morrow. . ."

Stocks beat a speedy retreat.

The fire had burned up and without greeting the Archdeacon, Norton stood with his back to it, glaring with both eyes, although one was almost closed and glittering in its dark surround.

"Well. Get it said and get out, Littlejohn. And it'll have to be good, or else . . ."

Littlejohn waded-in without delay.

"I said I've seen Captain Van Dam. He's told me all about the rendezvous on the *Victoria*. . . ."

A pause as Norton tried to find words, and failed.

". . . You may think yourself lucky if I *allow* you to sleep here for the rest of the night. Van Dam's in gaol and that's where you ought to be, as well, Mr. Norton."

Mr. Norton could hardly contain himself, but in the eyes fear was slowly creeping and he was losing his poise.

"What do you mean? If you've anything to say to me, you can say it in front of the Chief Constable. I've had enough of you."

"Very well, sir. You'd better dress. I'm arresting you on a charge of being on enclosed premises without any right to be there and for resisting the police. You'd better come along."

"Wait a minute. What's all this about?"

"Get dressed quickly. Van Dam is waiting to identify you as his partner in to-night's incidents on the *Victoria*, and he's in a pretty foul temper, I can tell you."

Silence. A little cat emerged from the kitchen and began to rub round the legs of Norton's pyjamas. He kicked it away, and the Archdeacon picked it up and stroked and comforted it.

"We'd better sit down and talk this over."

"That's better, sir."

"But I warn you, I'm in no mood for trifling."

"Neither am I, sir. I, too, have lost a night's sleep through your misdemeanours. Let's get to business. What were you doing on the *Victoria* earlier this evening?"

"I . . . I . . . I wanted to see Van Dam on a business matter. That fool of a constable butted-in."

"He was doing his duty. You'd no right aboard."

Norton snorted.

"If it hadn't been for you and the police and your damned snooping, I wouldn't have needed to go there at all. As it is, I find it impossible to get a quiet talk anywhere without you and your gestapo looking on. I knew the *Victoria* was deserted and accessible so I rang up and asked Van Dam to see me there. It was private business and has nothing whatever to do with you."

"Let me be the judge. What was it about?"

Norton licked his lips, undecided whether or not to burst into a fit of rage again. Then he gave in.

"Van Dam had some jewellery he wanted to sell. Now, you can imagine us meeting in a public house or even here and me examining them, can't you, with you and your snoopers popping round every corner . . . ?"

"So, you met in secret somewhere where you could examine the loot? That what you're trying to say?"

"Loot! What loot? It was perfectly honestly acquired."

"Unset diamonds on a ship coming from Amsterdam. . . . Come, come, Mr. Norton. You can't expect to get away with that."

Norton blew-up again.

"That's the truth and if you don't damn' well like it, Littlejohn, you can lump it."

"What do you want with diamonds, Norton?"

"I'm a wholesale jeweller in a big way . . . and the name's Mister Norton, too."

"So you were buying smuggled stones from Van Dam?"

"NO! I tell you they were his own stones. I mean. . . . He's had them for some time and wanted to . . ."

"The truth is, Norton, that Van Dam took the diamonds from Crennell when they picked him up unconscious and took him aboard the *Rijswijk*. Van Dam's admitted it. He said he was bringing the stones over to hand them to Crennell's next-of-kin."

Norton thought again. He wondered how much Littlejohn knew.

"Very well. I'd better tell you. The only reason I've tried to keep this dark was that you're so damned suspicious. You just wouldn't have believed me if I'd told you."

"Try me."

"They were Crennell's own stones. He'd got them from somewhere in the past and kept them as a sort of ready-money reserve. . . ."

"Is that what you were hunting for in Queen Street the other night when I found you there?"

"Yes. I just wanted to know they were safe. They weren't there. I know one of the policemen at Castletown and earlier in the day I asked him if Crennell's body had been robbed while he was away on the *Rijswijk*. He just said they'd heard that his personal belongings had been recovered from the ship. Odds and ends and a thousand pounds in banknotes. That was all. I knew then that if he'd had the diamonds on him in the little chamois leather bag he carried them in, as likely as not they'd been stolen. So I made an excuse to Mrs. Cottier to get in the house and have a look for them. They weren't there. . . ."

"You heard, too, that Leeuwens, skipper of the *Rijswijk*, had been found dead in the harbour at Amsterdam?"

"The policeman told me that."

"But how did you know about Van Dam becoming captain in his place and that the *Rijswijk* was on her way back to Douglas?"

"I have my means of information. As a matter of fact, I phoned to my office on the mainland. I've a branch in Hatton Garden which deals in stones with Amsterdam. They got me the full news."

"And you got hold of Van Dam to discuss the diamonds?"

"I wanted to be sure that they weren't aboard the *Rijswijk* when she was searched."

The Archdeacon was still nursing the kitten which was purring. Outside, the wind was rising and whistling round the hotel. From being annoyed, Norton had now grown earnest. He was anxious to convince Littlejohn. Littlejohn himself felt fagged-out. It was difficult to keep his thoughts together.

"You thought of making an offer to Van Dam for the stones?"

"Certainly not! If he didn't intend handing them over to Crennell's representatives, he'd stolen them. I didn't even get as far as asking him if he

had them. We'd no sooner got there than a blasted bobby arrived, flashing his torch about."

"And you resisted arrest, struck the constable, and scuttled off. You'd better go to Douglas to-morrow, Mr. Norton, and make your peace with the police. It might involve you in a magistrates' court, but it will be better that way than my having to arrest you here and now and take you in. Meanwhile, you will not, as you told Mr. Stocks, be leaving to-morrow. Unless you give me your word, I shall take you back to Douglas and have you remanded in custody till it's safe to let you go free again."

"You can't do that. There's such a thing as habeas corpus here, too. I know the law."

"I don't want to start a legal argument at this hour of the night. Have I your word, or do we go back to Douglas?"

"All right, then. I'll stay on another day or two. Can I go to bed now? I'm not so well . . . ."

He didn't look well either, with his bump on the head and his black eye. Served him right!

"Just one more point and then we'll break up. How did you know about Crennell's diamonds in the first place?"

"He wrote and wanted me to buy them, knowing I was in the trade."

"When did he write?"

"A week or two since. He said he'd send them by post if I was interested, or bring them himself. I replied that I was coming over here in a matter of days and would see him then."

"He said he'd post them to you, did he?"

"Why not? A lot of the diamond trade's done by registered post."

"What are they worth?"

"I haven't seen them."

"How did you know they were in a chamois leather bag, then?"

"Crennell said he kept them in it when he wrote. He said he'd had them a long time and had held on to them as a speculation. Now, he needed the money. . . ."

"Presumably to set up Nancy and her husband on a new farm."

"That's what it looked like. Where are the stones?"

"In the safe at Douglas police station."

"How many of them are there?"

"We counted about forty. Van Dam had them sewn in his belt."

"Well. . . . Crennell said he'd kept them for a rise in price and I guess he was right. He said they were worth about four thousand pounds and he wouldn't take less. Without seeing them I wouldn't make an offer, but diamonds have gone up a lot since Finlo got his lot. It certainly paid him to keep them if they're any good."

"Did he tell you where he got them when he wrote?"

"No. He simply said in his letter that he had them by him, he'd got them years ago, and thought they'd keep just as well as money. Better, in fact, because money got worth less and less. Which was good, common-sense economics with things as they are at present. Perhaps they're the proceeds of some smuggling racket Finlo was mixed-up in years ago. There's still plenty of it done by unscrupulous seamen."

"But Crennell wasn't unscrupulous! He was a good, religious man, with a high sense of duty. All our investigations have proved that. Not a bad word about him; never a dirty trick on record. He was also a little bit ingenuous and simple-hearted, I'd think. The very fact that he kept a small fortune in diamonds in a little bag at home or round his neck plainly shows that he wasn't much of a money-grubber. All he wanted money for seems to have been to help other people. It looks as if he was going to give the lot to Nancy. What I can't understand is, what was he doing with all his wealth on him at the time he was knocked out on the quay the first time?"

"That's your business, not mine. And can I go back to bed now? I've said I'm not well. . . ."

Norton was quite plaintive. All his spirit seemed to have ebbed. He passed his hand over his brow, winced as he touched the lump from Corris's truncheon, and then gently felt his eye to see if the swelling were going down.

"You need a beefsteak on that, Norton," said the Archdeacon, gently putting down the cat and getting up from his chair.

"My wife's bathed it. . . . Well, good night."

He shuffled off, his huge bathgown billowing behind him, and slowly and heavily climbed the stairs again. They could hear him close the door of his room, bump across the floor above, and fling himself back in bed.

Mr. Stocks materialized, looking more haggard and baggy under the eyes than ever, and let them quietly out. The cat followed the Archdeacon and they had to take it back and ring the bell again.

"A good job we've no other visitors staying in," sighed Mr. Stocks as he took the mewling animal over. "Else there'd have been a proper riot. Mr. Norton's just rung the bell and asked for a raw beefsteak and all we've got in the frig is a leg of lamb . . . What a night!"

It was four o'clock when they took the turning to Grenaby. As they passed the houses of the old and superstitious, those who awoke covered their heads in panic at the sight of lights from headlamps and the rush of the vehicle, for many still believe that the Phantom Coach makes its grisly way from Solomon's Corner to Grenaby and that anyone who sees it is sure to drop down dead.

## ANOTHER BLACK EYE

SINCE the arrival of Littlejohn, Knell had gone off cigarettes and bought himself a pipe, a replica of the Chief Inspector's. He spent a long time smoking it in the vicarage garden on the morning following the fracas on the *Victoria*. When he arrived at half-past eight in the little police car, rubbing his hands and ready for business, Mrs. Keggin looked at him like a bull at a red rag.

"What do you want at this hour?"

"I've called for the Inspector, Mrs. Keggin."

Knell drew at his new pipe in voluptuous little puffs, for it was drawing well and it was a nice sunny morning into the bargain.

"Well, you can go your ways and come again in about two hours. He's not up yet. Him and the parson were workin' long after you'd gone to bed. They didn't settle till nearly five o'clock. They've earned their rest."

"Five o'clock! Whatever happened?"

"I'm not the one to be tellin' you. It was you started it all, comin' for them last night. Jack-a-dandy work, I call it. They'll be in a jerrude all day from want o' sleep."

"Can I wait for the Inspector, Mrs. Keggin?"

"Ye can come in for a cup o' coffee, then, and afther that, ye'd better scatter, because I've housework to do and I can't be bothered with you clutterin' up the rooms."

When Littlejohn looked from the bathroom window at nine o'clock, he was surprised to see Knell carrying two buckets of coal from the woodshed at the back of the vicarage. About an hour later, they left for Castletown.

On the way, Littlejohn told his companion of events of the night before, after he'd left the police station.

"I always suspected Norton, sir."

"Yes, but not of murder, yet, Knell. I want to see him again, right away, though. Perhaps he'll be in better shape for a talk this morning."

At the *Dandy Rig*, Norton and his wife were still in their room.

Stocks, the landlord, looked put-out when Littlejohn asked to see Norton again.

"I don't know how he'll take it. It didn't end when you left last night. He'd gone up to bed when I let you out, but it all began again about ten minutes later. He'd a hell of a row with his wife when he got up in his room. He was shouting and she was crying and, unless I'm very much mistaken, he hit her. Then it gradually died down and by five o'clock the house was settled. I feel ruddy awful this morning. I've hardly slept. Are you sure you can't wait till later in the day? He might even hit *me* if I try to get him up. . . ."

With that, Mr. Stocks, baggy-eyed, half asleep, and five feet eight in his stockinged-feet, pulled himself up an inch higher and clenched his fists.

". . . And if he 'its me, I'll damned well hit him back. I've stood about enough. I'll mop-up the floor with Mr. Clever Norton. . . ."

"Right. Tell him I'm here and I want him as soon as possible, and if he cuts up rough, you do as you say and I'll see he doesn't sue you for assault."

"But . . ."

"Just tell him, Mr. Stocks, and we'll take a stroll along the shore while you do it."

They left the car and walked along the little promenade. The sun was shining and the air crisp and keen. The tide was in and some of the locals were out in their boats, bringing in lobster pots or off fishing beyond the breakwater. A breeze fanned the water into tiny ripples which sparkled in the sunshine.

There were a few golfers on the links at Langness and far out on the skyline, the smoke from the morning boat to Liverpool was just visible. Ahead, the long rocky spur of Santon Head and the little inlet of Cas-ny-Hawin; behind, the clear hills, coloured in autumn bracken and heather, sweeping north and south. A 'plane from the mainland flew in from the sea and made a graceful landing on the airfield.

"I wonder what the Nortons were at after I left them last night."

Littlejohn hadn't spoken for a while. He and Knell had been thoughtfully smoking their pipes and as Littlejohn looked around and admired the beauty of the day, Knell had been occupied throwing a stick in the water for a small dog which had adopted him and which retrieved it as fast as Knell flung it back.



Finally, the dog, satisfied, shook himself all over the bottoms of Knell's trousers, wet them through, and then went home.

When the pair of them got back to the hotel, some surprises were waiting for them.

Norton and his wife were in the small room where they dined and which they used as a private retreat. Both were in a good humour and received the police with a "good morning" each. Tension seemed to have been relieved between them; they looked more friendly than Littlejohn had ever seen them, and Norton's usually sullen face wore a trace of a self-satisfied smile.

Although, when Knell and Littlejohn entered the room, Mrs. Norton tried to hide her wrists by pulling down the sleeves of her cardigan, Littlejohn noticed they were bruised. Norton's black eye was still there but less livid and, as though to keep him company, Mrs. Norton had one as well, which she had half-successfully hidden with a thick coat of powder!

So, after his departure of the night before, the Nortons had had a fight of some kind!

"I thought I told you all you wanted to know in the small hours last night. I can't spare much time now, Littlejohn. It's Cribbin's funeral this afternoon."

Norton had lost all the edge from his temper. In fact, for him, he was quite civil.

"I won't keep you long, sir. How's the eye?"

Norton shrivelled up a bit.

"Getting on all right. What did you want?"

"It's about Crennell's diamonds. Did Van Dam actually offer them for sale? This is important, because, if he did, it's a case of pure theft on his part. If he didn't, but wanted to restore them, it's a minor charge and he should be free."

"I made it quite clear last night, I thought. I knew of the existence of the stones, because Crennell wrote to me about them. When I heard Van Dam was back in the island, I naturally wanted to know if he'd got them."

"He didn't offer to sell them to you?"

"No. He didn't even get a chance to mention it. The bobby blundered on board as soon as we got together, and before I knew where I was, he'd set about us both and blacked my eye. I thought it best to get away."

"I want to ask you again, now, do you or your wife know where Crennell got the stones from?"

"No."

Mrs. Norton wasn't smiling any more. She began to look afraid.

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. How could we know? We've been away from Crennell for years. Anything might have happened."

"What time is the funeral?"

"Two thirty at Ballaugh. We'll have to be getting ready. . . ."

"Will Mrs. Cribbin be fit to see us about one or two things afterwards? How is she?"

"She's all right. Provided you go gently with her, she should be fit to talk to you. Shall I tell her?"

"Please do. We'll be over about four, then."

"Very well. Is that all?"

"Yes."

"I guess we'll see you again. . . ."

"No doubt about it, sir. By the way, could you just give me the date when Cribbin wrote to you about a loan and, if possible, the dates of Crennell's letter to you and your reply?"

Norton looked ready to protest again. He was so edgy that almost any question seemed to rattle his nerves. His wife put her hand on his arm.

"It'll be no trouble, Nim. You have all the correspondence in your brief-case. It's upstairs. I'll get it."

She hurried off and brought down the bag before Norton could refuse. He took it and zipped it open. Then he began to rummage among the papers.

"This is a nuisance when we're in such a hurry. Here we are . . ."

He took out several letters and thumbed them over.

"Cribbin's letter's dated October 10th. . . . And here's a carbon copy of the reply I dictated to him. It's dated October 13th."

He actually handed the correspondence to Littlejohn to read.

Cribbin, in a slow immature hand, telling of a series of bad seasons and his need for more capital and saying that Nancy had suggested his writing to Norton. He wanted to borrow £1,000 for his immediate needs and wondered if Norton could put him in touch with finance for a further £3,000 to improve the farm and put it on its feet.

"Have you noticed how much he asks for, Littlejohn? He'd got a nerve! In my opinion, he was just trying it on because of my wife. I soon put him right on that."

Norton's answer stated that he was unwilling to lend any money at all until he'd gone thoroughly into Cribbin's finances. He always made it a rule to invest his funds with his eyes open and if satisfied that he wasn't risking them unduly. "I shall be crossing to the Island with my wife very soon and will go into matters with you then."

"And you arrived here when, sir?"

"October 23rd. I've told you that before."

Littlejohn took out his note-book and entered details of the letters.

"And here's Crennell's note and my answer."

Two sheets from a cheap writing-pad, carefully written in a good bold hand.

October 17th was the date of Crennell's note, as though, having received Norton's letter putting-off the loan, Cribbin had got in touch with his father-in-law at once and asked him for the money.

*I have need at once for a large sum of money and am thinking of selling some diamonds I have kept by me as an investment. I wondered if you are interested in buying same as I could send them to you or else bring them if you are . . .*

All straight and above board in Crennell's usual fashion. The diamonds mentioned as though he had lawfully acquired them. No secrecy; nothing furtive. . . .

And Norton's carbon copy of his typed reply. He was shortly crossing to the Island . . . perhaps about the 23rd or 24th of October, and would discuss the matter then.

So, once again, Charlie Cribbin, hard-pressed for cash, was told to wait.

All the money Crennell could lay hands on was his £1,000 in the savings bank, and he'd have to give notice for that. He'd done it and withdrawn the cash from the local post-office and had it in his pocket ready to hand to Cribbin on October 28th when his first accident happened.

"You arrived on October 23rd, Mr. Norton. Yet, you didn't call to see Cribbin until November 7th, when you found him dead. What was the reason for the delay?"

"I . . . I . . ."

Norton was getting impatient again. His wife touched his sleeve.

"I thought you were going, Littlejohn. I'm in a hurry. Let's get this over quickly. The crossing was a bad one. I took a couple of days to get over it. I'm a bad sailor and I don't much like air travel. I'd decided to go to Druidale the day after Crennell disappeared. There was such a commotion about it and my wife was so upset, I just put Cribbin out of my mind. I was in no mood for him. When Crennell turned up again, I told my wife I'd see Cribbin then. That's all there is to it. She'd been to see Nancy a time or two in a hired car."

"When did you call to see Nancy, Mrs. Norton?"

"Two days after we got here. October 25th."

The old disquiet seemed to possess Mrs. Norton, as though once more, Littlejohn was treading on delicate ground.

"Did you see Cribbin then?"

"Yes. He was about the farm, busy with the stock. We didn't have much time together. I spent most of it with Nancy and the children."

"Did Cribbin mention his financial affairs to you?"

"No. . . . No, he didn't."

She was on edge, as though afraid Littlejohn might put his finger on some awkward spot.

"Did Nancy say he'd written to Mr. Crennell as well as to your husband?"

"It was just mentioned."

Littlejohn felt he was somehow getting warm, and yet he couldn't just strike the right place.

"Very well. Thank you both. I won't detain you any longer."

Mrs. Norton gave a long, almost imperceptible sigh. Relieved . . . but why?

In the car, before Knell started the engine, they looked over the Chief Inspector's notes together.

13. writes to Norton for £1,000 and suggests a further £3,000. Norton replies and puts him off.
16. Cribbin writes to Crennell for a similar loan. (?)
17. Crennell writes to Norton about selling diamonds.
19. Norton replies again delaying. Says he will arrive in I.O.M. about Oct. 23.
23. Norton arrives at *Dandy Rig*.
25. Mrs. Norton

goes to  
Druidale.  
Finlo  
Crennell  
disappears.

"What do you make of it, Knell?"

"I wish we had a few more details of what happened in between, sir. What Cribbin was doing, for instance."

"We'll try to fill in some gaps with the help of Nancy later to-day."

On the way back to Castletown, Littlejohn sat silently sucking his cold pipe.

"Bit of a puzzler, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes. But to-day's main event is Mrs. Norton's black eye. It looks on the face of it, that she wants to keep him company in the way of disfigurement, doesn't it?"

Knell sniggered.

"Did you notice anything else about her . . . in fact, about the pair of them, Knell?"

"She was nervous when you questioned her before we left. She's not telling all she knows, is she?"

"No. But it's the way they met us which puzzles me. After I left Norton last night, he went to bed again and then set-about his wife. He even used violence and in the struggle, gave her a mild black eye and held her wrists so tightly that there were nasty bruises on them this morning. Why?"

"Something you said to him must have made him mad and he took it out of his wife. How's that, sir?"

"Not quite. Did you notice their relationship when first we met them? For the first time since we've known them they were really friendly with each other. Norton treated her with kindness and, in spite of her black eye, she looked happy. Something happened between them after I left which has altered their life together."

"They do say, don't they, that if you treat women rough, they like it. . . ."

Knell pondered deeply, probing his knowledge of female psychology.

". . . Perhaps the beating-up he gave her made her love him more."

"Not this time, Knell, and not at their age. You've been reading Ethel M. Dell. . . . No. Norton thought his wife was keeping something secret from him and it rattled him. All this Crennell-Cribbin affair must have made him think things and perhaps his wife's behaviour has puzzled him and made him distrust her. Perhaps it even led him to think she'd really loved Crennell at one time, or even still did. He was jealous and maddened by her holding something out on him. Finally, after having been routed out in the early hours and after having his eye blacked by a Douglas bobby, he sees red and makes up his mind he's going to get the truth from his wife if he has to strangle her to get it. That accounts for the black eye and the bruises. She told him the truth and he understood. Relations between them improved right away. In fact, Knell, *they have become allies against us*. Norton is on his wife's side, now. He's forgiven her. Now, our problem is to make them talk."

"You might have been there when it happened, sir, the way you've got it all taped. You'll have to question them till they break down, now."

"A third-degree? We don't do that here, Knell. We've got to get more background, enough to build a theory of what they know, and then face them with it."

"But how?"

Knell shouted it in a despairing voice.

"*Doucement*, Knell. . . . Gently does it."

Over the bridge again, with the sun shining on the water and the knots of old salts gossiping on the quayside. A baker was unloading bread from his van and the butcher was chasing the dogs from his shop again. The same quiet routine, day by day, the same peace of the old town which got in your bones and made you want to idle the time away. Just as Crennell had done until Charlie Cribbin had upset it all.

They parked the car. A man passed with a roll of carpet over his shoulder, a woman was feeding the birds in the market square with crumbs, the castle clock struck noon, and Littlejohn saw Mr. Morrison emerging from the bank. He crossed to speak to him.

"I'm so sorry to hear . . ."

"It was expected, you know, Inspector, but now that it's come, I can't believe it. Good of you to sympathize. . . ."

Morrison looked completely broken and old, and laid his weight heavily on the stick he was carrying. Littlejohn would have liked to ask

Morrison if, during the days when Crennell worked on their family boats, there had been any trade, legal or illicit, in diamonds. But it wasn't the time. Besides, an elderly man was approaching and it was obvious from the manner in which he removed the smile from his face as he drew near, that he was going to offer condolences.

At the police station, P.C. Quayle, from Ballaugh, had been on the telephone. He and his colleague from Kirk Michael had been the rounds of the villages in an effort to discover how Charlie Cribbin had got to Castletown on the day of Finlo Crennell's death. They . . . or rather Quayle, who had modestly spoken in the first person plural . . . had been successful.

A farmer named Frissell from Smeale had been on his way by car to Douglas on Saturday, November 6th, and had picked-up Cribbin in Ballaugh at half-past two in the afternoon. They had run into Douglas together and even had a drink at Charlie's expense on arrival. Cribbin had left for Castletown on the five o'clock bus.

Not only that, but Quayle seemed to have given Frissell a good grilling about Cribbin's behaviour, as well. Charlie had been very cheerful. On top of the world, in fact. Anything *but* a bankrupt, judging from the way he'd carried-on. Paid for two drinks for Frissell when one would have done, said he'd got the good news of Crennell's return, and that he was on his way to see the old chap and bid him welcome home. . . .

And yet, Charlie Cribbin had never got to Queen Street to see Crennell. He'd probably arrived about six o'clock in Castletown and spent the rest of the time between then and leaving, in the *Trafalgar* and elsewhere.

"Let's try to find out how much time Cribbin spent at the *Trafalgar*. . . . Where is the pub? No . . . no . . . I'll go myself. I'd like to see what the place is like . . . and the landlord."

It was a modest inn, built in the working-class quarter of the town. A maze of narrow, old streets with cottages of grey stone. The landlord was an Englishman called Schofield. The natives didn't seem much taken with keeping beer-houses and left it to comeovers.

Schofield was a little fat man with a round face, liquid blue eyes, and a large grey moustache.

"Like a drink, Inspector?" he asked as soon as Littlejohn had introduced himself. He said it eagerly as though seeking an excuse for one himself.

They talked over two pints of ale.



"Cribbin didn't come 'ere offen. I don't think 'e came to Castletown much, if you ask me. Lived in the wilds round Snaefell way. . . ."

Schofield was going to tell Littlejohn a lot that he already knew, so the Chief Inspector took matters in hand and cut-in with questions.

"Do you remember his arriving on the day of the murder . . . last Saturday?"

"Sure. Who wouldn't, seein' that he went and got his self murdered next day? I never thought as I saw 'im sittin' there drinkin' his pint that . . ."

"What time did he arrive?"

"'Bout half-past six to start with. He'd a drink, sat a bit, talkin' with one or two as was here, and then went out. Quarter of an hour later, 'e was back again, havin' another."

"Where had he been, did he say?"

"No. But seein' he did the same thing twice more, I'd say he'd come to Castletown to see Captain Crennell, who was 'is relative by marriage, as you well know."

"What makes you think that?"

The landlord looked at the empty glasses, cocked one eye questioningly about re-fills, Littlejohn shook his head and said No-thanks, and Schofield's face fell.

"Well . . . I think Cribbin come here in the first place to kill time. He'd come to see Crennell, see? And findin' the police there and other callers when he went round to spy out the land, 'e popped back for a drink till a more suitable time when he could see the old cock alone."

"Why alone?"

"Matter of fact, Cribbin, after he'd had a drink or two an' got a bit matey, told one of the chaps as was in here . . . I was too busy to bother, myself, it bein' Saturday and us bein' pushed like . . . 'e told another customer that he'd called to see Captain Crennell, who was home at last, on a bit of private business. . . ."

"And he kept taking a walk round to Queen Street until the coast was clear; is that it?"

"Eggzackly right. Matter of fact . . ."

"And he left for the last time?"

"Just before nine, before the news come on over the wireless. I told the bobby as called that."

"Thank you very much, Mr. . . ."

"Schofield's the name. Came from Wigan to 'ere five years ago for me 'ealth. Chest. . . ."

And he coughed hoarsely to prove it. Apparently the change hadn't done him much good!

Knell and Littlejohn lunched in town and then drove to Grenaby to pick up the Archdeacon and take him with them to Kirk Michael. The funeral was over at Ballaugh Old Church when they arrived, and the funeral 'tay' was taking place in a small schoolroom. The place was packed to the doors with mourners now eating refreshments. Even the two local policemen were present, minus helmets, assisting in disposing of ham, bread and butter, celery, and soda cakes.

The arrival of the official party, especially of the Archdeacon of Man himself, was regarded as a great honour, and short of being discourteous, the trio had to join in the feast. The long local agony of the violent death in their midst had ended with the interment of the victim, and beneath a surface of solemnity, there was almost an air of joviality in all quarters except that of the near relatives. After the grim ordeal of the graveyard, it was good to be alive and kicking!

The family had made its headquarters in the cottage of a friend nearby, a whitewashed little single-storeyed place with a thatched roof. As everyone was occupied at the 'tay', Littlejohn and Knell were able to have a quiet word with Nancy in the cottage over the way.

As they entered, Littlejohn turned and paused at the door and admired the view. Ahead, the flat expanse of fen country, the curraghs, stretching to the sea, with Jurby church a landmark, and to the right, the point of Ayre just visible. Behind, the great mass of the Manx hills, more massive through comparison with the low curragh lands over which they towered majestically. The fragrance of the bog-plants filled the air, in the waste-lands the curlew and bittern were crying, and in the mild autumn, flowers still bloomed in the cottage gardens. Nearby, Ballaugh Old Church, with its crooked gateposts and its ancient graves.

Nancy drew up the blinds and let in the last sunshine of the dying day. A melancholy silence clung to the quiet land, made more sombre by the cries of the lonely birds.

"We won't keep you long, Mrs. Cribbin. In fact, if it will distress you . . ."

She made a forlorn gesture with one hand.

"No. Might as well get it over, sir."

She looked better than last time he'd seen her. The colour had returned to her clear complexion and she held herself upright again. There only remained a kind of languid despair and pain in the fine dark eyes, the bewilderment of sudden shock and of a future dim and unknown.

"It's about some of your husband's movements of late, Mrs. Cribbin. . . . He was trying to borrow money for his farm, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"He wrote first to Mr. Norton."

"No. First to the bank, then he called to see them. Not only did they say they couldn't lend him any, but they asked him to pay back the bit he was overdrawn."

"After that, he wrote to Mr. Norton?"

"That's right. And Mr. Norton put him off."

"Then, he asked your father?"

"That's right. Dad said he'd help him. He'd about a thousand pounds in the post-office and he'd give notice to get it out and give us that. . . ."

"Give it to you?"

"That's what he said. He didn't need it and might as well let us have it while it would be useful, instead of in his will."

"Your husband told you that?"

"Yes. And dad had some investments he'd sell and use in makin' the farm better. I didn't want Charlie to do that. I wanted him to remove to where he could use his money to better purpose, but . . ."

"Did your father tell Charlie what the investments were?"

"No. All Charlie told me was, it would take a bit of time to get the money."

"What date would that be about?"

She looked surprised at the closeness of the questions, but said nothing about it.

"I can't say for certain. All I know is, that it was just before my mother came over on the 23rd of October."

"How did your husband seem about all this financial worry?"

"Worry. . . . That's the right word. Worried to death. Even after dad said he'd lend the thousand, Charlie was upset. You see, he wanted the money right away. He said he couldn't wait. What with the bank and other bills. He was afraid somebody would go to law about it."

"And he worried right to the end?"

"No. After Mr. Norton and my mother arrived, he seemed better. I think he thought Mr. Norton would come to the rescue right away."

"Instead of which he stayed away, even though he was on the Island."

"Yes. But my mother called to see us two days after they got over. That seemed to cheer Charlie up."

"Did she promise anything?"

"No. But the fact of their being here . . ."

Littlejohn looked puzzled.

"Did you and your mother have a long talk?"

"Of course. We don't see one another much. We'd a lot to say to one another."

"Forgive my being so pressing and inquisitive, but what did you talk about?"

Suddenly, Nancy's guard went up. Just as her mother's had done, earlier in the day.

"About the family, and us, and her. A lot of things women talk about and things they don't say to men."

She was fencing with a vengeance. Littlejohn felt it was not the time to press the question too hard.

"Things they don't say to men. . . . I see. What might those be?"

She gave him a strange look, not of modesty or coquetry, but of determination not to tell it, almost a challenge.

Littlejohn changed his tack.

"Was Charlie about when you had this private talk?"

She suddenly looked startled, as though such a thing hadn't occurred to her before.

"No. Why should he be?"

"Where was he at the time?"

"About the yard seeing to the cattle and the milking."

"Where were you when you talked?"

"In the living-room. Why?"

"There's a kitchen behind, Mrs. Cribbin?"

"Yes."

"And where is the dairy?"

"In a lean-to next door."

"With a door through into the kitchen?"

"Yes. I don't know what you're getting-at. What has it to do with Charlie and his death?"

"Probably nothing. I'm interested in the lay-out of your place, that's all. Just another question or two, and then we'll go."

"I hope so, sir. They'll be thinkin' and wondering things at the 'tea'. . . ."

"Was Charlie upset when your father disappeared and he couldn't get his first instalment of a thousand pounds?"

"We were both upset about dad, of course. He was so good to us. Charlie said not to worry about the money. In any case, he said, it would probably be left us in dad's will if anything had happened to him. Charlie wasn't worried about the money; only about dad's not being found."

"Where was your husband on the night your father first disappeared? Do you know? Was he at home?"

"No. He'd business in Douglas about the farm. He went just after tea. . . ."

"After tea? A funny time to do business, wasn't it?"

"I said the same, but he said he had to meet a man in a public house there . . . a farmer about buying some cattle when the money came. He was going to bring the children's fireworks, too. . . ."

She stood there, a picture of despair, stricken by the memory of little, intimate domestic things. Littlejohn found it hard to press his questions.

"What time did he get home? Did he go by car?"

"On the tractor. It was after midnight when he got to Druidale. The tractor went wrong at Glen Helen. . . ."

Knell suddenly broke his silence.

"Glen Helen! That's a long way round, isn't it? Did he go to Douglas and back that way? It's a lot nearer over Ingebreck and down through Baldwin from Druidale, isn't it?"

"I said that. But Charlie said the road was rough that way. He went down and through Michael and Ballacraine."

"Funny. . . ."

"What was funny? I don't see what it has to do with you what Charlie did?"

Knell blushed in the face of this rebuke and grew silent again.

"I think that's all, Mrs. Cribbin, and thank you very much for helping us. Your husband was upset by Mr. Crennell's disappearance, I'm sure. Did

he do anything to help in finding him? I mean, did he go down to Castletown about it?"

"No. He said we couldn't do much. The police would look after it. It hit him hard, though. I've never known him in such a funny mood. He seemed to do a lot of worrying and thinking again. Not so much about the money. As I said, he told me we'd no need to worry on that account because of the will. But somehow, he brooded over dad's vanishing. . . . "

"Did he seem excited about it?"

"He did a lot of talking . . . more than usual, if that's what you mean. He talked about what he'd do with the money that was coming to us."

"Yes. Well, shall we go? And again, thanks, Mrs. Cribbin."

They crossed the quiet road back to the little school. Dusk had fallen and the mass of the hills seemed to loom more than ever above the curraghs. Lights glittered on the hillsides and in the cottages. There was a smell of wood-smoke on the air and from the sea, a sharp salty breeze. The mourners were saying good-byes and going home. Only the old gossips showed a tendency to remain, exchanging ancient tales of their own little land and the people in it.

Littlejohn and Knell gathered up the Archdeacon, sitting among a group of old Manxmen, and little was said on the way back. It was not until they sat drinking coffee before the vicarage fire that Knell spoke what was on his mind.

"Queer way to go to Douglas from Druidale. All the way round by Ballacraine, instead of straight down through Baldwin. Miles out of the way. Do you know what I think?"

"What *do* you think, Knell?"

"Charlie Cribbin didn't go to Douglas at all the night Crennell first vanished. He went to Castletown instead, and he was there at the time Crennell was attacked."

"You mean . . . ?"

The Archdeacon sat up aghast.

"I mean to my way of thinking, Charlie Cribbin had more to do with Finlo Crennell's disappearing than we thought."

Littlejohn removed his pipe and knocked it out against the side of the open grate.

"Your knowledge of the roads and geography of the Island is far better than mine, Knell, but I agree with you. I do agree."

And he took out his note-book and made another entry.

Oct. 28th.

Finlo Crennell disappears, about 10.0 p.m. Charlie Cribbin in Castletown about that time.

"Do you think Charlie Cribbin murdered Crennell, then, Littlejohn? Surely not!"

"No, sir. But I think Charlie was blackmailing somebody and, for some reason or other, Crennell got mixed-up in it and the victim murdered the wrong man!"

## A GAME OF SOLO

NIGHT again. As Littlejohn crossed the market square there wasn't another soul about. The fluorescent street lights were all burning, the great mass of the castle, with the candlestick memorial flanking it, loomed through a screen of leafless trees, the only sound was the caterwauling of cats, fighting in the bushes of the filled-in moat. It was like a scene set for some pageant or great historical tragedy, waiting for the entrance of the players from the side-streets to left and right.

Littlejohn puffed his pipe, hands deep in the pockets of his coat. He had sent Knell home and was once again wandering like somebody fascinated among the narrow streets of the silent little town. As though he expected Finlo Crennell suddenly to shuffle, smiling, from the shadows and re-enact the scene which ended in his death.

Lights glowed behind the curtains and blinds of the houses and in the rooms above shops. One or two of the shops were illuminated still, cafés and a fish-and-chip restaurant from which now and then emerged the blast of boiling fat. Several of the houses had their wireless-sets going and as the Chief Inspector walked along, he could hear the programme uninterruptedly, from set to set as he passed.

Finally he turned into Queen Street again and made for Crennell's old house. The blind was drawn but there was a light in the front room. After the funeral, Mrs. Cottier had returned there. It was her home, and tired of bickering with her masterful sister, she had gone to it until she could make up her mind about the future.

Littlejohn knocked at the door. Footsteps down the corridor and Mrs. Cottier stood in the doorway, silhouetted by the dim light from the hall lamp with its shade of beads, which swung about and rattled together as the draught caught them.

"Oh, it's you, sir. . . ."

She was wearing spectacles and hastily removed them.

"May I come in and talk to you, Mrs. Cottier?"



Littlejohn didn't quite know why he'd called there, except that he thought that somewhere in the house might be a clue which would unlock the case for him. He knew a lot about Finlo Crennell, but not enough. Not enough to confirm a vague suspicion which had been growing in his mind. .

..

"Come in. I was just havin' my tea. It's a bit late, but I've been puttin' things in order. It's surprisin' how dusty and cold a house gets even if you only leave it for a day or two. I thought I'd come back till I made up my mind what to do. No use livin' away and the place gettin' damp for want of fires. Besides, it's my home and Finlo left it to me."

In the living-room the table was spread for one. A plate of cold pork, half eaten, tea things, a butter dish, and a large half-empty bottle of tomato ketchup. A half loaf on a bread-board with a carving-knife to cut it. A newspaper propped-up against the milk-jug. The pork looked so good that Littlejohn wouldn't have minded picking up a piece in his fingers and tasting it. He grew suddenly hungry. He'd only had a light tea and was taking supper late at the parsonage.

The room was warm and cosy again. The furniture had been polished and the whole place dusted. The clock on the wall had been wound-up. Littlejohn realized that its rhythmic ticking was what he had missed last time he was in the room. Now, the atmosphere seemed complete again. The queer ticking, like the bouncing of a ping-pong ball. Pink-ponk, pink-ponk.

...

Everything ready for the return of Finlo Crennell. . . .

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

Littlejohn said yes, and almost said he'd try the pork, as well.

"Sit down, sir."

He took the rocking-chair and Mrs. Cottier sat in her chair at the table.

"You don't mind if I . . ."

She indicated the food, and then hastily removed the newspaper and put it under the cushion of one of the other armchairs. She began to eat quickly.

"Take your time, Mrs. Cottier. Don't give yourself indigestion on my account. I'll smoke, if you don't mind."

Littlejohn filled his pipe, took a folded spill of paper from a little brass ornament on the mantelpiece, and lit it. The smoke slowly drifted across the room.

The pair of them sat there, one on each side of the fire. Just as she and Crennell had done in the old days.

Pink-ponk . . . pink-ponk . . . pink-ponk . . .

Mrs. Cottier seemed to have recovered her composure after her ordeal of recent days. She sat quietly eating, unmoved by memories of the past or fears of the present, content to be home again. The only change Littlejohn noticed in her was that she had aged. Her face looked thinner, her hair greyer and more unkempt, her eyes heavy and more lines beneath them.

"You've known Mr. Crennell all your life, Mrs. Cottier?"

She stopped chewing for a moment, as though surprised to hear him speak.

"Yes. He was a friend of my husband's and a distant relative of mine. He was best man at our weddin'. Him an' my husband had been friends all their lives. Finlo wasn't born in Castletown. He came from Ballabeg, but his father an' mother moved to here when he was a child. My husband and him were brought up together, went to the same school and chapel. . . ."

"You're a native of Castletown?"

"Yes. I was a few years younger than Mr. Cottier and Finlo, but I went to the same chapel, too, an' I remember them as big boys when I was little."

"You were in Castletown when Nancy was born?"

A pause. Delicate ground again.

"Yes."

"What did you think about it all?"

"I don't understand what you mean."

To hide her nervousness, she started to wipe her hands on her apron.

"I think you do, Mrs. Cottier. Were you and the rest of the town surprised at the local scandal ? Did you think it was the sort of thing Finlo Crennell would do?"

"No, we didn't. He didn't seem that sort. Never eyes for any woman 'cept his wife. But it was done. There it was, so what could we say?"

Silence again. The clock ticked on and coals fell from the fire and tinkled on the hearth from time to time. Littlejohn drained his tea-cup and put it back on the table.

"Suppose you try to tell me what happened when Nancy was born. I mean, the gossip of the town, the surprise of everybody, what they said . . . and so on."

It was very cosy there. Littlejohn felt settled for the evening, gently rocking to and fro in Crennell's old rocking-chair, smoking his pipe, gossiping. . . .

"It's a long time ago."

"Try."

She pushed her cup and plate away, drew back her chair from the table, and sat facing him, her hands quietly laid in her lap on top of her apron.

"We was all surprised. He was a man with a good reputation. A churchgoer when he was back from the sea; read his Bible and his Pilgrim's Progress. And by no means a hypocrite."

The last phrase came out like a challenge to Littlejohn to say anything wrong against Crennell.

"Was he a heavy drinker?"

"Never. I've never seen him the worse for drink. You'd perhaps smell it on him when he came back o' nights from the *Jolly Deemster*, but he was always steady and talkin' sense."

"And yet, he seems to have drunk more champagne than was good for him on one occasion and landed himself in a lot of trouble which lasted his lifetime and, in the end, caused his death."

Her mouth opened and she looked afraid.

"His death? What has that to do with Nancy?"

"Nothing actually with Nancy, but somehow, Charlie Cribbin was involved in the tragedy."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about!"

She had grown paler and her features were drawn with some kind of emotion.

"It's a long story, Mrs. Cottier. Too long to tell now. But you haven't told me what the town said about the birth of Nancy."

"Oh, I'm sick of Nancy!"

It came out suddenly, as if Mrs. Cottier couldn't hold it in any longer. Then she looked sorry she'd said it.

"Well. . . . I'm waiting."

She fumbled with her apron, took out a handkerchief and wiped her lips, and seemed to be lost for words.

"I'm not meanin' that Nancy's to blame, but when you come to look at all the trouble. . . ."

"You mean the rift between Finlo Crennell and his wife after Nancy was born, the flight of Mary, the misfortunes and death of Charlie Cribbin, the death of Finlo . . . ?"

Mrs. Cottier gazed vacantly ahead, listening to the string of catastrophes, trying in her slow way to follow what Littlejohn was getting at. Then she returned to the first misfortune.

"Who said there was a rift between Finlo and Ethel?"

"You did. You said they hardly spoke to one another after Nancy was born."

She paused again, obviously trying to clear her thoughts and find words. The clock ticked on. Pink-ponk, pink-ponk. Littlejohn filled his third pipe and lit it with another of Finlo Crennell's paper spills.

"I didn't mean to say they fell-out . . . never spoke to one another again. They didn't speak much at any time. Ethel was such a worker. Busy all the time keepin' the house clean. Mornin', noon and night, moppin', sweepin', dustin' . . . Finlo was a talkative sort, but he liked to talk about ships and the harbour and such like. Ethel wasn't interested. They just got on well together without much fuss. After all, the harbourmaster's house on the quay is a big place, you know. And Ethel wouldn't have any help."

"So, you didn't get the idea that Mrs. Crennell disapproved of Nancy and never forgave her husband about it."

"I never said that."

"No, but when I asked you before, you gave that impression."

"I never. . . . Perhaps it was because my sister was there and I was bothered."

"In other words, you know more about the life of Finlo and his wife than you care to tell. You know more than outsiders, shall we say, and you never talk about it. You were a close friend and saw or knew things others didn't. Is that it?"

A catch of the breath and a mouth opened ready to speak. Then, a silence and the same reserve shown by Nancy and Mary Norton.

"It's nothin' of the kind. I only said they didn't speak much, an' you twisted it to mean somethin' else."

She rose and started to gather the tea-things together as an indication that the interview was coming to an end.

"Did you know that Finlo Crennell had a bag of diamonds he'd got from somewhere?"

She paused and turned.

"Yes. I've seen them. Only handled them once, though. Finlo was very secret about them. They was very valuable. It's been on my conscience to tell you that them was what Mr. Norton was after the night you found us here searchin' in the sailor's chest upstairs. Mr. Norton told you a lie. I didn't like it, but what could I do?"

"Mr. Norton told you outright that was what he wanted?"

"Yes. He'd had a letter from Finlo about them and wanted to be sure they hadn't been stolen. We never found them."

"They are now at Douglas police station."

"What! What are *they* doin' with them? Did *you* take them?"

"No. They were taken from Finlo when he was aboard the Dutch ship the first time he disappeared. We got them from the mate."

"Finlo had them when I came here as housekeeper. When he showed them to me, he said he was keepin' them because the price would go up. Then he'd sell them for more, some day. He never let anybody else know he had them, for fear he might get robbed and he made me promise not to tell about them. Now and then, when we were in alone, he'd lock the door and get them out and put a sight on them and count them. Like a child playin' with toys; or a magpie. It didn't seem healthy, somehow."

"Did he ever say where they came from?"

"No."

"But you guessed?"

"No . . . no . . . I never . . ."

She seemed flustered and shut her lips firmly.

"Very well. Don't get excited. But you're not telling me all you know, are you, Mrs. Cottier? Is it because I'm a stranger . . . a come-over . . . probing family secrets? Or are you sworn to secrecy or just being commendably loyal to someone?"

"I . . . I don't like this talk. It's tryin' to twist things out of me and make me tell things I know nothin' of."

The cosiness seemed to have gone from the room. Hostility and a sense of being unwelcome had taken its place.

Littlejohn rose and took up his hat.

"When did Finlo become harbourmaster here?"

"In the year Nancy was born."

"Why did he leave the sea?"

"A lot of them did. Shippin' went down. There was a lot of unemployed. Ships were laid-up. My own husband, who had a master's ticket, had to ship as second officer on a Liverpool boat . . . "

"The Castletown boats were laid-up then?"

"Sold, sir. It was a bad knock. . . ."

She seemed to cheer-up even on such a tragic topic, as though relieved to change the subject.

"They were sold because the owners fell on bad times."

"The Morrisons, you mean."

"Yes. The family was nearly bankrupt. It's said they'd have been sold up if Mr. James hadn't come back from abroad with a fortune. He died within a year. About the time Finlo became harbourmaster, it was. He left all he had to his mother, who was still alive, because he'd never married himself. And old Mrs. Morrison died soon after and the money went to Mr. Gabriel . . . that's the one whose wife has just passed over. A lovely woman, she was. Such a sad loss. I'll never forget all she did for me."

"Why?"

"I was in service with the Morrisons from leavin' school till I married. I remember Mrs. Morrison comin' to Framley Lodge as a bride. She was beautiful and so good to us all there."

"You were . . ."

Then there was a knock on the street door, they heard the knob turn, and Mrs. Christian entered. She glared at Littlejohn as though he'd no business to be there and her face took on a peevish look.

"I called to see if you'd settled. But if you're busy I can come another time."

"I'm going, Mrs. Christian."

"Were you goin' to ask me somethin', sir?"

Mrs. Cottier was showing her sister it was purely official. It was obvious that the strait-laced Mrs. Christian frowned upon finding her sister alone with Littlejohn, in *tête-à-tête*.

"Never mind, Mrs. Cottier. I'll go now. Good night and thank you."

In the quiet streets again. Quay Lane, the quay itself, the harbourmaster's house, the harbour. . . . Not a soul in sight. The lapping of the tide against the jetties, the flash of the lighthouse across the bay, the sound of a radio playing in the harbourmaster's house. . . . Lights in cottages

on the waterfront, the glow of the street lamps in the sky over the town, the rumble and rush of traffic along the by-pass road. . . .

Littlejohn found himself in front of the *Jolly Deemster*, the cosy glow from the curtained windows shedding a soft light in the street, just as when Finlo Crennell had died. He opened the door.

A large room with a bar at one end. A few neat tables and chairs and an upholstered seat which went round the room by the wall. The mingled smells of beer and spirits, and smoke hanging round the three shaded lights which illuminated the place.

It was mid-week and custom was thin. Two men drinking at the bar and, in one corner, on the old chairs and table which Littlejohn remembered from his first visit there, four men playing cards.

"*I'll go misere. . . .*"

All eyes turned on Littlejohn. The landlord nodded from behind the counter, where he stood framed in bottles of all kinds and colours. His wife was talking to the two men beside the beer-pumps.

"Good evenin', sir."

" 'Evening, landlord."

The card game had ceased and the men were listening. Finlo Crennell's cronies, and now the man with a glass eye had taken Crennell's place and was playing his hand. He wore a bowler hat on the back of his head. The other three were bare-headed. Littlejohn eyed them quickly and got a mental snapshot.

Three typical men of the port. One, small and chubby, like Crennell himself, with a red face, large puffy hands holding his cards fanned-out, a short pipe in his mouth, a round head covered in short, grey, wiry hair.

Opposite the man with one eye, a serious, wiry chap, a cut above the rest. A smart grey suit of rough tweed, long clean hands, large nose, hatchet face and a good forehead, Face clean-shaven and furrowed, and complexion pale almost grey. The dark little eyes were shrewd, a bit cruel even. He might have been a shopkeeper or a clerk in someone's office. Perhaps retired, for he looked over sixty.

The remaining man wore a blue suit and a jersey instead of a waistcoat. A fisherman by the looks of him with a rugged, long, tanned face, blue eyes and a rough moustache. The hand which held his cards was heavy and abscess-scarred as though at times he'd had trouble with fishhooks.

Each of the card players had a glass of beer before him. It was obvious the little fat man wanted to get on with the game. He had made the call and was eager to take it. But the man with a glass eye was too curious.

"Evenin', sir. You the famous Inspector from Scotland Yard? Glad to meet yer. I was the first to find Crennell. . . Poor Finlo."

The others plainly wished he'd shut-up. The three of them had been Crennell's pals and missed him too deeply for boasting. One-eye was an interloper. He'd only been in Castletown ten years; the rest had lived there all their lives.

"Good evening. . . . "

Littlejohn strolled to their table and sat in the corner in an empty chair.

"What can I get you, sir?"

"This one's on me, Edgar."

But the landlord wasn't having Glass-eye taking the lead.

"It's on the house."

"Beer like the rest, please. Don't let me spoil your game."

They went on again, but all except the fat man had lost a bit of zest.

"*Pass. . . .*"

"*Solo . . .*"

"*I'm bust. . . .*"

It was One-eye's turn to deal and he held it up until the beer had been served. Even then, he paused, eager to talk.

"Any nearer findin' who did it, sir?"

"I'm afraid not."

A mixed lot, and all Crennell's old friends. A retired mariner, a fisherman who owned his own boat, a shopkeeper or office man. Glass-eye was a bit of a mystery, perhaps a cheapjack of some kind and a bit of a cadger. The only man in the quartet with dirty ill-kept hands. He later turned out to be a dealer in old furniture and secondhand clothes. . . .

The beer arrived. They played their hands in a little dry circle of the table in the centre of the damp rings made by the glasses. It was just nine o'clock and in the next room the radio time-signal was introducing the night's news.

More trouble in China.

A conference in Paris.

Imminent fall of the French Government.

A hurricane in Florida. . . .



Someone closed the door and cut it off.

"I'll have to go, too. Got to see a man about a deal. Like to take my hand?"

The man with a glass eye rose unsteadily and fumbled in his pocket for money. Then he straightened his hat.

"Good ni'. . . . Be seein' you."

The other three looked relieved. The fat man raised an eyebrow at Littlejohn. "Care to play?" It seemed to be all he thought about; keeping-up the four at cards. That was why he'd asked One-eye. There'd been nobody else.

Littlejohn dealt the grubby cards.

"We only play for halfpennies. Just to give a bit of interest, leck. All right to you?"

"Yes."

Littlejohn leaned back in his chair, puffing his pipe luxuriously, examining his hand. He felt as comfortable as he'd done in Crennell's old home in Queen Street. Cosy room, good company, mellow Castletown ale, and his pipe drawing its best.

*"I'll go abundance.* The Inspector's brought me luck."

The fat man could hardly play his cards quickly enough.

"By the way, my name's Cretney. . . ."

The big fisherman got in a word whilst the fat man raked in his tricks.

"This is Lucas Finch. . . ." The well-groomed grey man nodded.

"And Sammy Craine, here, is the solo expert. He's the one who started it all. Till he learned to play cards an' roped us all in, we used to talk or else play dominoes. Now it's solo all the hours God sends. . . ."

The fat man started to shuffle, Littlejohn cut, and Finch dealt with swift skill.

*"Pass. . . ."*

"You played most nights with Crennell?"

"Yes. Just an odd hour or so before closin' time, leck. As I said, Sammy started it all."

Cretney was a bit of a wag with a smile in his eye. Whenever he could, he made a joke at Craine's expense.

*"Six. . . ."*

*"Get 'em if you can. . . ."*

"Did Crennell seem to have anything on his mind just before he disappeared?"

"*Bust. . .*"

The fat man stretched out his hand to the loser for his coppers and laid down the cards.

"Are we goin' to talk a bit?"

"Yes. We'll play again before closin' time. . . ."

"Did Finlo seem to have anythin' on his mind? Naw, I wouldn' say so. Not one for broodin', was he? Talked to us about his problems. Always spoke his mind. Didn't he?"

Craine and Finch nodded.

"Did he say anything interesting before he left you for the last time?"

Cretney scratched his head.

"Seemed he was plannin' to lend Charlie Cribbin some money. He did ask us if we knew anythin' about farmin'. None of us knew much. My dad ran a croft of kinds when I was a boy, but that's a long time since. All the same, Charlie wasn't the one to be lendin' anythin' much to. A high-flyer, too fond of spendin'. . . ."

"You'd no reason for thinking Crennell was in trouble of any kind?"

"Naw. Throuble? What throuble should Finlo have?"

Sammy Craine fingered the scattered cards lovingly.

"Naw," he said.

"Did Finlo ever mention diamonds to you?"

All three began to look interested, especially Finch whose dark little eyes lit up attentively.

"Why?"

"He had a bag of diamonds with him when he disappeared. The mate of the Dutch boat has handed them over."

"Van Dam?" said Craine in a husky deep voice. "That's a wonder. Never liked him. Comes here quite a bit, leck. Wouldn' have parted with 'em except to save his own skin."

"Probably you're right there. But did Finlo mention the stones to you ever?"

Finch licked his thin lips.

"Yes. I knew he had them. He once showed them to me. I reckon they'd be worth a thousand or two. He said he was keeping them for a rainy day and they'd increase in value by the keeping. He was perhaps right."

"Do you know where he got them?"

Cretney and Craine, bewildered, shook their heads. Finch gave Littlejohn a queer look and shook his own, too.

"Perhaps some deal while he was at sea. He always kept that to himself. One of the few things he never spoke of. That's right, isn't it?"

Craine and Finch nodded again. It was like a little court of inquiry, making a report on Finlo Crennell.

They had drunk three more rounds of beer and Cretney was the most talkative. Finch seemed to be nursing some thoughts of his own and Craine was eager for his card game again.

"Diamonds. . . . A few Manx fortunes made in them. That's so, isn't it. . . ?"

More nods.

". . . My father's uncle Mark did well out at the mines. Settled down in South Africa and made a fortune. His wife's family got it all though. An' then there was Joseph Mylchreest, the Manx diamond king. Ever see the big White House at Michael? That was his. Came home an' did a bit of good to his own li'l Island with his money. . . . An', I forgot, there was Diamond Jim, too, made a fortune in Kimberley and brought it home to die. You should tell the Inspector about Jim, Lucas. You know all about him. . . ."

"Shut up!"

Finch snarled it and his thin lips curled with anger.

Cretney looked shocked.

"Come, Lucas, no offence. Didn't know you was so touchy. After all, you were Morrison's book-keeper till you retired. Diamond Jim saved the family fortunes, didn't he? Just came home in time. . . ."

"That'll do. I don't want to discuss family business here. Let's get on with the cards."

Cretney shook his head in a good-humoured effort to understand what he'd done wrong.

"All right, if that's the way you want it, Lucas. But I must say it's a bit rude to the Inspector. . . ."

"I'm sorry, but . . . well. . . . This isn't the place to discuss the family. I'm a bit upset on account of Mrs. Morrison's death. I didn't intend to be rude."

Finch was anxious to smooth things over and make them forget his outburst.

"All right. You shuffle 'em, Inspector. You don't mind, do you? I mean, Lucas didn't intend to be rude, did you, Lucas?"

"Of course not."

Littlejohn shuffled the cards and Craine dealt eagerly.

"*Pass. . . .*"

So. . . . Diamond Jim. . . . The late James Morrison had turned up from Kimberley about the time all the trouble of Nancy had started. And Finch, the old retainer of the Morrison family, didn't want to talk about it. Another who dried up and grew secretive just as things were getting warm.

"Your shout, Inspector."

"Sorry. . . . *Misere. . . .*"

Until the landlord called 'Time' and Littlejohn left for Grenaby, he thoroughly enjoyed the game. Good companions, good beer, a cosy corner in a warm room. And in the Chief Inspector's mind, that faint stir of excitement which he always felt when he found the first trail and the case began to show some sense.

## THE MAN WHO SHOT SEAGULLS

THURSDAY, and another funeral.

This time it was Mrs. Morrison's and the procession to the family vault at Malew was timed for eleven o'clock in the morning. It was another cold, sunny day and Castletown was in mourning again. Black everywhere, shops closed, people almost walking round the streets on tiptoes. A repetition of Crennell's last day in town, except that whereas Finlo had been a beloved local character, the Morrisons were bigwigs and the funeral of any one of them called for even more public respect and mourning.

The Archdeacon was attending the funeral, the local police were represented at it and keeping order in the matter of arrangements, Knell was detained in Douglas in a case of robbery with violence in the Deemster's Court, and Littlejohn was left to his own devices until noon.

The Chief Inspector had never visited the part of the Island which lies between Castletown and Port St. Mary on the coast road, and at half-past nine, therefore, he filled his pipe, lit it, and set out to walk as far as he could and get back by noon to meet the Archdeacon. He briskly passed through Arbory Street and struck the main road which by-passes the town.

"Just as you get past the turning into the by-pass, notice the two mansions on each side. One on the left is Balladoole, home of the Stevensons for hundreds of years and the present owner of which is British Ambassador to Egypt. The one on the other side, Ballakeighen, was occupied at one time by Captain Quilliam, who navigated the *Victory* at Trafalgar. Beyond Balladoole is Poyll Vaaish Bay. Its name means Death Pool but that refers to the black marble they quarried there, some of which was once used for the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral."

Littlejohn remembered it all and took note of the parson's instructions lest he disappoint his old friend.

A blue sky with white scudding clouds and the sharp tang of the sea on the breeze. A car passed now and then; otherwise the Chief Inspector had the place to himself.

He gently climbed the road until he reached the summit and there on Fishers' Hill, he suddenly came upon the finest panorama he'd ever seen on the Island or anywhere else.

The wide sweep of the Bay ny Carrickey, with the waves lashing the Carrick Rock in the midst of it, came in view. Castletown with its grey towers at one end, and at the other, the great Mull Peninsula terminating in Spanish Head, with the Mull Hills and Bradda Head in the background. The road ran round the lowlying shore of the bay, passing a small stone chapel and farmhouses built four-square and strong against the elements, like fortified refuges surrounded by thick granite walls. Port St. Mary nestling in a corner of the coastline of caves and precipitous rocks and the morning train puffing its way from Port Erin in a lot of steam and bustle.

Littlejohn looked at his wrist-watch. Ten-fifteen. Ahead lay the mansion of Kentraugh, protected from the elements by a screen of wind-tortured trees. Just time to get there and back for noon.

And then, Littlejohn noticed the man with the rifle. He had reached the shore near the deserted chapel and the whole coastline of the bay was visible. Near where the Archdeacon had described Poyll Vaaish and given details of a coastal footpath back to Castletown, a man was standing and, as Littlejohn spotted him on the skyline, he raised his gun and shot a seagull in flight. The bird jerked in midair and fell like a stone. The next shot brought down a jackdaw, but the man seemed to take no further interest in his quarry. Instead, the barrel of his rifle described an arc and before Littlejohn could move or even grasp what was happening, a bullet whistled past his ear. Then another. He could hear the two faint slaps as the bullets hit the wall of the chapel behind him.

The Chief Inspector acted instinctively. He flung himself, like a rugby player making a flying tackle, behind a large dune covered in grass and marsh daisies. Then he fully realized what was happening. Someone had seen him leave Castletown, had followed him, and was taking potshots at him. From all appearances, if he had been successful and killed Littlejohn, he would have, in the unlikely event of discovery, pleaded bird-shooting on the foreshore and an accidental ricochet. . . .

Whoever it was, Littlejohn had already taken a violent dislike to him, quite apart from his own safety. He didn't like men who shot seagulls and jackdaws!

Littlejohn's mind filled with all kinds of things, like a mad phantasmagoria.

He was well-screened by the tussock and the grass and, by gently parting the stalks, could see his assailant, peering ahead, trying to make sure his bullet had done the trick. It looked as if the man was undecided whether or not to cross the field between them and investigate. He hesitated, and then decided to make for the spot where Littlejohn had fallen. His rifle was over the crook of his arm and he shifted it to a position where he could again fire from the hip.

Littlejohn could not at the distance and from where he was lying, make the man out. He wore a dark felt hat and was of medium, loose build.

The Chief Inspector's thoughts raced.

He even found himself still admiring the view regretfully. From where he lay, he could see the whole spread of the bay and the road winding as far as Kentraugh, half-way between himself and Port St. Mary. There was not a soul in sight. A railway engine whistled wildly and out at sea a large cargo boat slowly passed along the horizon. The breeze whipped the blue water into white tops, the gulls rode the crests with indolent grace, and a little party of wild duck paddled down a small stream to the shore.

Unless someone turned up quickly and disturbed the man with the rifle, the conclusion was almost obvious. If Littlejohn jumped up and ran for it, he stood a good chance of being mown down, for whoever his enemy might be, he could certainly shoot. A gull and a jackdaw on the wing. . . . Not bad.

A large car, driven hard, descended the road in the direction of the sea from Castletown. Littlejohn not daring to rise, hoped the driver would see him. Instead, the car cornered madly, accelerated, and went off in the direction of Kentraugh hell-for-leather.

And then, from the opposite direction, Port St. Mary to Castletown, there appeared in the distance, an ungainly salvation, a van high on an ancient chassis, driven almost painfully. Littlejohn watched his approaching antagonist, who had halted in his steps as the previous car appeared. The man now hesitated again, turned, and began to run in the opposite direction, all the time looking back over his shoulder, lest the Inspector should get on his feet or the van pass the spot where Littlejohn was lying without stopping to investigate. In his anxiety to follow all going on behind, the man with the rifle missed a patch of uneven ground. He stumbled, threw out his arms,

righted himself, halted, and then, apparently having twisted his ankle, ran, hobbled and skipped out of sight.

*J. Kermeen. Baker. Ballafesson.*

A large and ancient bread-van driven by a large and ancient Manxman with a shock of white hair, white moustache, good pale-blue eyes, and leather gloves. He wore a cap and spectacles.

Littlejohn had never in his life been so pleased to see anyone! He actually found himself looking at the gloves!

"Hurt yourself, sir? Been stumblin' among the tussocks? Bit rough, there. . . ."

Mr. Kermeen seemed anxious to excuse Littlejohn for lying full-length in the grass. The Chief Inspector decided not to mention the incident of the rifle.

"Yes. . . . Just measured my length in the grass. . . . Wrenched my ankle, and I'm in a hurry."

"Jump up, then, sir."

Littlejohn sat beside Mr. Kermeen in the cab.

"Lookin' at my gloves? It's just a little fad o' mine, sir. Clean bread. Bread's the staff of life, isn't it, sir? Not right to handle it with dirty hands as you've bin drivin' a car and handlin' dirt with. May seem a bit eccentric to you, sir. But there's so much dirty bread. . . . Keep my hands clean."

Littlejohn wondered if this was going on all the way to Castletown. Mr. Kermeen seemed such a decent, happy fellow, that Littlejohn hadn't the heart to interrupt his little lecture on clean bread. He needn't have bothered, however. Mr. Kermeen, impressed by the fact that Littlejohn had said he was in a hurry, was cracking on speed. He accelerated to thirty and the old contraption almost left the road. They tore and bounced past the spots Littlejohn knew, Balladoole, Ballakeighen . . . and then off the by-pass and down Arbory Street into the town. Littlejohn was surprised to see it was only twenty minutes to eleven. It had seemed like hours.

As they passed the end of the side street leading to Framley Lodge, he could see the cortège of Mrs. Morrison drawing-up at the house.

"Take me to the police station, will you, Mr. Kermeen?"

He pressed a ten shilling note in the hands of the honest baker and thought it little enough for what Mr. Kermeen had done that day. The baker, however, was indignant and it was as much as Littlejohn could do to get rid of the note and his new friend.



At the police station, the solitary constable was surprised to see the Inspector.

"I thought you'd have been at the funeral, sir. Everybody who is anybody's there."

"Quickly, Costain. Is there a rifle-club in Castletown?"

"Yes, sir."

Costain was taking it easy still, thinking Littlejohn ready for a chat.

"Have you a list of members permitted to own rifles?"

"I wouldn't put it that way, sir. We've a list of the rifles and who owns them. . . ."

"Get it out as quickly as you can, please."

The files and books were neat and in good order at Castletown police station and the record was produced right away.

Littlejohn ran his finger down the list.

Two Caines, three Callows, a Corteen, and four Costains . . .

Finch. . . . Lucas Finch. . . .

"Do you know anything about Lucas Finch, Costain?"

"A local man, sir, and was a friend of the late Finlo Crennell. He was cashier, or someth'n for Morrisons before they closed up business."

"What does he do now?"

"Retired several years, sir. Has a pension from Mr. Morrison. He'd been with the Morrison family all his life. . . ."

"Is he a good shot?"

"One of the best. Why? Nobody's been . . . been shot."

"No. I'll be seeing you."

Littlejohn raced along the street and down Malew Street to where the cortège had gathered in front of Morrison's home. There was a constable on duty there, keeping back the crowd of townspeople gathered to show respect. Littlejohn beckoned him and he saluted smartly.

"Is Mr. Lucas Finch here?"

"He's just joined the procession in his little car."

"Go and tell him he's wanted here, please. Don't say who wants him."

The constable looked puzzled and had he been without helmet, might have scratched his head, but he obeyed. He went a few yards along the street, put his head in a little car, and spoke to someone. Lucas Finch seemed to argue a bit, but the bobby got his way.

Finch scrambled out, put down his left foot gingerly, and gently limped after the policeman. Then he spotted Littlejohn. He looked ready to turn and run at first, but, surrounded as he was by sightseers and all of them with their eyes on him, he had to brazen it out.

"You wanted me, Inspector? I must say this is a bad time to be bothering anybody. They're just going to carry out the coffin."

"Had an accident, Mr. Finch?"

"I trod on a tack at home just before I left. Why?"

"It looks more like a sprained ankle to me."

Littlejohn looked at the black jacket, the black hat in Finch's hand, the build of the man. . . .

"You got back quickly from the seashore, sir."

Finch licked his thin lips and his eyes shifted.

"I don't know what you're talking about. . . ."

Littlejohn beckoned the bobby again.

"Take Mr. Finch quietly to the police station, officer. There's a lane just here. Take him that way without fuss."

Finch flushed and blustered.

"Have a bit of sense. I don't know what you're doing, but you'll pay for this. At Mrs. Morrison's funeral, too. Where's your respect for the dead? It's as much as your jobs are worth, both of you, when Mr. Morrison gets to know of this."

"That's our business. Now, are you going quietly or are you going to make a fuss?"

"I don't know what it's all about. . . ."

The crowd was beginning to scent a sensation and was thickening round Finch.

"What's all this for?"

"Only attempted murder, sir."

Finch turned chalky white and the constable did the same. His eyes roamed over Finch's apparel in the region of the pockets, hunting for bulges.

"Take him along, officer. He's not armed."

The pair of them, captor and captured, disappeared down the alley, the constable wondering whether or not to hold Finch by the arm or handcuff him, or what. . . .

The crowd melted away again in the direction of the Morrison house, where the hearse was now standing and the undertaker's men fussing round ready for the coffin.

The bearers, the coffin, the wreaths filling two cabs, then the mourners. One by one . . . Morrison, his son holding him by the arm, his daughter and her husband, the canon. Relatives, dignitaries, Archdeacon Kinrade and the Vicar General, Island notables, prominent business men. The procession started to move slowly. Bared heads, the sun shining, the white wings of a solitary gull exploring the street.

The hearse passed Littlejohn as he stood to attention, his hat in his hand. Then the first coach of mourners; Morrison was looking straight ahead. By the window sat a woman in deep mourning with Canon Grebe-Smith on her left hand. The sun striking through the opposite window silhouetted the profile of the woman, beautiful and perfect in its maturity. Littlejohn's eyes fell on her. He was standing half-bemused by the morning's events. The narrow escape he'd had earlier, the remembrance of Mrs. Morrison, and now, her last journey. Almost without thinking, as though someone were asking the question at his elbow, a vivid thought entered his mind.

"What is Nancy Cribbin doing there?"

And then he understood, and he saw the solution clearly before him.

## DATES IN A DIARY

As soon as the funeral of Mrs. Morrison passed out of Castletown public gossip turned to a new and exciting event.

Lucas Finch had been arrested for the murder of Finlo Crennell!

When his card-playing companions heard of it, Sammy Craine left his cottage in The Crofts and Cretney his boat at Derbyhaven and turned up at the police station to give Finch indignant alibis. Why, Lucas had been playing cards with them at the very time Crennell first disappeared and again when he was shot outside the *Jolly Deemster*! But the police didn't release Finch for all that.

At the police station, Littlejohn had questioned Finch.

"What's the idea of taking a pot-shot at me, Finch? Did you think I was perhaps getting too near the murderer of Crennell?"

Finch licked his lips. It was a habit he had and he did it almost before every sentence.

"I didn't take a shot at you. I told you, I was out shooting birds."

It had never dawned on Finch that Littlejohn hadn't actually recognized him on the foreshore. He took that for granted.

"Shooting birds just before you were due at a funeral? I suggest you followed me, made a detour in your car just past Balladoole, and caught up with me again at the bottom of Fishers' Hill."

"I did nothing of the kind. I'd an hour to spare before the funeral; the boy who brought the milk said the ducks were down on the shore; and I took my rifle to try and get one for supper. That was all. You're making a lot of fuss about nothing and Mr. Morrison will be angry when he hears you took me from the funeral for this. If a bullet did pass you, it was a mistake and it must have re-bounded off a rock on the beach."

Just the excuse Littlejohn had anticipated.

"For a man who's fond of shooting, you don't seem to know the difference between a duck and a seagull or a jackdaw, Finch. You killed two birds that obviously weren't ducks before you shot at me."

"I tell you, I didn't shoot at you. It was all an accident. I'm sorry. I can't say more than that, can I?"

"You shot a gull and a jackdaw, you sighted and shot at me. You must have seen me go down, you came to investigate and then, when Mr. Kermeen arrived in his van, you skedaddled as fast as your legs would carry you, and you sprained your ankle into the bargain. Then you said you'd trodden on a tack. Do you expect me to believe you, Mr. Finch?"

Finch's little eyes seemed to have sunk deeper than ever under his large projecting forehead. He was stubborn and would need a lot of questioning before he broke down and gave any information at all.

"I can't make you believe me, Mr. Inspector. But I've told the truth. I didn't shoot at you. Why should I? I've nothing against you."

"Haven't you? Don't you know a bit more about Finlo Crennell's diamonds than you care to tell? In fact, don't you know the whole tale which through the years led down to Crennell's murder? And didn't you think I was getting too close to learning the whole wretched story?"

Finch rolled his head from side to side like someone with a bad headache.

"I don't know what you're talking about. As far as I'm concerned I can't imagine why anybody should want to kill Finlo. I hadn't anything to do with it . . . ."

"Where did Crennell get his diamonds from?"

"How should *I* know?"

Littlejohn picked up his hat.

"Lock him up in the cells, Costain, and let him be quiet and make up his mind what's best for him. I'm going out. . . ."

Finch started to wave his arms about.

"You can't do this to me. I've not done anything. You can't put me in gaol for an accident. I didn't shoot at you. What's the charge?"

"Obstructing a police officer in the execution of his duty. That's a light one for you, Finch, and you're lucky it's not attempted murder. The charge may be altered to that later. Or, if you decide to tell me all you know, I may forget the pot-shots. Think it out. . . ."

Finch was led off, asking for a lawyer, demanding his midday meal, threatening what would happen when his old boss, Morrison, heard the way he'd been treated.

Knell bustled in. His face was flushed.

"You've made an arrest, sir?"

Littlejohn told him all about it. Knell wanted to take up where Littlejohn had left off and give Finch a first-rate grilling. Third-degree and *passage à tabac* would have been nothing compared with what the outraged Knell would have given Finch if they'd let him loose.

"Calm down, Knell, and come and look at this diary with me again."

Littlejohn opened his note-book.

"You see, Knell, here we have it. Between October 10th and 23rd, Charlie Cribbin was on tenterhooks hunting for funds to pay his debts and keep his farm going. Norton had been approached and had put him off; he'd then asked Crennell, who was withdrawing his £1,000 from the Post Office and, from all appearances, going to sell his diamonds, as well."

"That's right. But why give all he had to Cribbin? Was it on account of Nancy, his girl? He must have thought a lot of her to do that."

"Yes. He was a decent fellow and generous at that, too. But why, as an old man, who might, in the event of a long illness, need money to fall back on, should Crennell completely beggar himself? I can only think of one solution. That the diamonds were Nancy's property and Crennell was going to sell them and give her the money. Meantime, to keep the wolf from her door, he was going to let her have such ready cash as he held in the Post Office."

Knell's face was a picture of bewilderment.

"It doesn't make sense, sir. Where would Nancy get all those stones? She was only a poor girl."

"Look at the diary again. Cribbin is worried to death about money. Finlo comes to his rescue. Then Finlo vanishes with his money and diamonds in his possession. That should have been the end of Cribbin's hopes, for Norton, to whom he'd also appealed, was a very doubtful proposition. But was Charlie overwhelmed? Not at all. Nancy tells us he was optimistic and full of assurance. Hardly the way a bankrupt whose backer had vanished would behave. What had happened meanwhile?"

Knell shook his head.

"What *had* happened, sir?"

"Look here again. October 25th. . . . Mrs. Norton at Druidale. There she held a private talk with Nancy. What was it about? And let's assume that Cribbin, supposed to be busy in the milking-shed, is actually changing

buckets in the dairy and overhears the women talking. He's only to slip through the door into the kitchen and he can listen in to it all . . . . "

"It must have been something very dreadful to cause all this trouble. . . ."

"Not at the time. Nancy has grown-up now, has a family, and her mother can talk to her, woman to woman. Suppose they discuss money matters and Nancy says they're on their beam-ends, but Crennell has offered to give them a thousand in cash and sell some securities for the rest. Mrs. Norton, Mary Gawne, owes Finlo Crennell a great debt of gratitude. He's taken and brought-up her illegitimate child. . . ."

"But it's *his* child, too, sir. He owes Nancy that, surely."

"Suppose Mrs. Norton says something like this: 'You shouldn't have done that. Taking all he has. It's just like him to help anybody, especially as he's so fond of you'. And Nancy points out that it's only what a good father would do anywhere. . . ."

Knell was breathing hard again.

"Yes?"

"And then Mrs. Norton comes out with it. '*But he's not your father*'. . . . And she then tells Nancy the whole tale."

"But . . ."

"Wait. Cribbin hears it all. And he makes up his mind to cash-in. He's bound by no promises, like Finlo, Mary, and the rest. He's not been paid to keep his mouth shut or play a part. He's free to put the squeeze on someone . . . someone who can pay through the nose to keep an old secret dark."

"But what proof have you, sir?"

"None. It's purely circumstantial at present. But Mrs. Norton is going to tell us now. I'm going to face her with it. But, first, we might get some sort of proof."

"Where?"

"Look at the diary again. On the 25th, Mrs. Norton was at Druidale. Let's say that Cribbin overheard the truth about his wife. Without saying a word to anyone, he writes the usual blackmail note to somebody. Perhaps like this, 'I will tell the whole story about Nancy Cribbin unless you pay me five thousand pounds in cash . . .' and he goes on to arrange how the money is to be handed over."

"But what's that to do with Crennell, if Charlie was doing the dirty work?"

"We assume that, like all blackmail notes, the letter is printed. The victim doesn't know who's written it. All he knows is that he's to pay five thousand, say, and he's raging mad, so mad he's prepared to commit murder. Now. . . . The diary again."

Knell bent over the entries as though to eat them.

"Let's say Charlie couldn't wait and wrote at once. October 25th. The letter would reach somebody on the Island on October 27th. This victim thinks a bit, first. Who knows the secret? Mary Norton, of course, and perhaps Nimrod Norton. But let's assume the printing and the paper eliminate a woman or an educated man like Norton. However he arrived at it, the victim decided in the end that Finlo Crennell was the blackmailer. The next day, the 28th, Finlo Crennell is attacked in the dark at a place where everyone knows he frequents. He walks round by the harbour for old times' sake every night after leaving his favourite pub."

"The victim intended to kill Crennell?"

"Yes. He hit him, but not hard enough. Crennell lurched into the water and was saved."

Littlejohn paused, filled his pipe, and lit it. Knell was busy consulting the diary again.

"But what happened then? There's no entry here between October 28th and November 6th, when you brought Crennell back and he was killed. . . ."

"You'll notice Charlie was in Castletown the same night. October 28th. Nancy confirmed that. He told her he was going to Douglas on the tractor. Remember? He went via Michael and Ballacrine instead of over the hills by the short cut through Baldwin. In other words, he came to Castletown and he got home after midnight. He was here when Crennell disappeared. He either came to see Crennell or his blackmail victim. Crennell's disappearance must have shattered and bewildered Charlie. He didn't know what to do. So he sat tight and waited. Then Crennell came back."

"And when Charlie heard you were bringing him, he came to Castletown again . . . perhaps to see him again for some money."

"Yes. And he waited until he heard Crennell was killed and then he beat it. But this time, he wasn't being fooled. He knew that his victim had killed Crennell. Who knows, he might have seen it happen as he hung about the *Jolly Deemster* waiting for Crennell either to arrive or come out of the pub. He must have been around Queen Street and found others there. His business was private, so he went back a time or two to the *Trafalgar* and



waited till the coast was clear. But whatever his movements and whatever he saw of the crime, he wasn't as I said, being fooled again. He got in touch with his victim and let him know quite definitely that the note hadn't been written by Crennell and perhaps he also put up his price on account of the murder. Who knows?"

Knell's head was down over the list of dates again.

"But Charlie was killed the next day, Sunday. He couldn't have posted another blackmail note to get there in time."

"No. I think he made his big mistake then. We'll soon find out. He beat it home and on the way, thought out his plan of action. He decided, I think, on something very stupid. He *telephoned* his victim and his victim thereby discovered who was on his trail."

"He traced the call? But that's not possible, is it?"

"It depends how you go about it. Now I want your help. How many automatic exchanges are there on the Island, because you can't trace a call through them, can you? It all depends on that."

Knell's face fell.

"The only manual exchange is Douglas. The rest are all automatic."

"Oh, dear. That's torn it! We'll have to start again and find another way. My theory there must be adrift. The victim couldn't have . . ."

Knell almost leapt in the air.

"Wait a bit, sir. If Cribbin rang up on the way from Castletown. Let me think. . . ."

Knell paused and went into a brown study.

"I've got it. If Charlie, as soon as he heard Finlo was killed, went to a 'phone-box in Castletown, he'd use the automatic. But if he 'phoned from Douglas, he'd have to get the exchange. . . ."

"But if he 'phoned from Douglas, that would be just as bad for his victim to trace. The reply he'd get would be, somebody or other in a Douglas call-box. No use at all. . . ."

Knell looked abashed and then showed his large teeth in a hopeful grin again.

"Charlie's a slow-thinking countryman, I'll bet. He'd ponder and put-off his next move for some time. Suppose he thought it all out on the back of Sammy Joughin's motor-bike on his way to stay the night at his dad's place at Michael, and when he got there, he 'phoned from a box."

"You know the psychology of the Manx farmer better than I do, Knell. I'm in your hands."

"Shall I ring up Sammy Joughin, if he's on the 'phone at his farm?"

Knell was already thumbing through the telephone directory.

It took a long time. First Sammy was disturbed at his lunch. Then, he had to be sure Knell was the man he said he was. Then, he had to digest the inquiry. What was it all about? Did it mean Sammy going to Court or the police station? Why was he being involved? He'd only given a fellah a lift on the way. If this was what came of givin' lifts, it was the last time.

Eventually, they arrived at it. He'd dropped Charlie Cribbin, not at his father's door, but in the centre of the village. Did Charlie go in the 'phone box? A long pause as Sammy turned over the pages of memory.

"Yes, he did. How do I know? I'll tell ye how I know. . . . Charlie Cribbin died owin' me threepence in copper. Said he was wantin' to telephone his missus about stopping the night with his dad. Hadn't enough change, so borrowed three pennies from me and said he'd see me right next time he was in the village. How do I get my threepence now? Do I have to write in about it?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Mr. Joughin. You'd better ask Charlie's dad when things have quieted down a bit. You what?"

"I can't stop any longer. An' I can't hear ye proper. My mother's in a rale tantaran about me dinner goin' cold."

"So Cribbin 'phoned his victim from a box in Michael?"

"Yes, sir. He'd dial 'O', get Douglas, and then ask for his number."

"Let's have a word with the Douglas exchange, then."

More dialling and more waiting. The man on duty on the night of Crennell's death was in the office. They went to find him.

"Police here from Castletown. Inspector Knell."

"Hullo, Reggie."

Knell coughed and looked at Littlejohn out of the corner of his eye to make sure the familiarity hadn't been noticed.

"Did you get a call for Castletown from Kirk Michael about eleven o'clock on the night of November 6th?"

"Ask me another!"

"Look here, this is urgent police business . . . the murder of Finlo Crennell, so be serious."

"Why didn't you say so, Reggie? I'll look it up. Wait, will you?"

A long pause.

"That you, Reggie? Yes. . . . There's a slip here for it."

"Remember anything about it?"

"I've got the number of the Castletown call. Castletown 15162. . . . I'll find the name if you like. . . ."

"Yes, do. But wait . . . was there any inquiry about the call after it was made?"

"I recollect somethin'. . . . Yes, there was. We'd a bit of an argument. You see, it's not our business to trace calls. When the Michael call was over, the Castletown subscriber asked where it came from. I said it wasn't allowed to answer such questions unofficial, like. The chap pressed it a bit, so to quiet him, I said it would do him no good. It came from a call-box at Michael. . . ."

"You didn't happen to listenin, did you?"

A loud commotion in the receiver gave Littlejohn to understand that the question was strongly resented.

"Now look here . . . no need to take-on like that. If you *had* happened to listenin absent-mindedly, leck, it would be a great help to us. . . ."

"Well, I didn't, and that's flat! All I heard was the last few words because the kettle was whistling for my tea and I wanted to find out if they were going to be at it for long. I just heard the Michael end say something like . . . 'Remember, put it in the place I said before, to-morrow at the same time. Then clear off. You won't see me, so don't try . . . ' Words to that effect, at any rate."

"Thank you very much."

"Don't mention it and don't suggest we listenin any more. We're not a lot of snoopers like the police. By the way, I've looked the Castletown number up . . . ."

Knell dropped the receiver when he heard the name, fumbled with it, apologized to the other end again, only to find the line was dead. Then he turned to Littlejohn.

"It was a call to Mr. Morrison, at Framley Lodge, sir."

And he marvelled that Littlejohn showed neither surprise nor excitement.

LITTLEJOHN and Knell had dined in Castletown and when they arrived at the *Dandy Rig* the rattle of dishes and the absence of cars in the little car-park told that the meal there was over, too.

"Are Mr. and Mrs. Norton in?"

The manager gave a bored sigh when Littlejohn asked the same old question.

"Yes. They're in their little sitting-room. They've not been out all day. If people want to stay indoors all the time, they shouldn't go away for holidays."

When the police were led in, Norton seemed to be answering correspondence and Mrs. Norton was playing patience.

"You again! What is it this time?"

Norton wasn't pleased with the intrusion, but his wife seemed alarmed, as though by intuition, she knew that something dramatic was in the offing.

There was a fog of cigar smoke in the room and Norton held a half-smoked, expired cigar between his teeth. He took it in his fingers and started to re-light it with a match.

"What is it this time?"

Norton said it again and seemed anxious to get it over and resume his writing. There were sheets of flimsy paper in front of him on the table, sheets covered in orderly rows of typewritten figures. Profits, losses, Big Business. . . . A scheme known in the vernacular of business as 'share-washing' and which would enable Nimrod Norton to draw a lot of spare funds from his companies without paying income-tax.

No wonder he regarded Littlejohn and all his works as small beer and a confounded nuisance!

Littlejohn looked from one to the other of the Nortons. Two lovely black eyes! But they both looked better and the Chief Inspector hoped that what he was going to say wouldn't upset the domestic apple-cart again.

"May we sit down?"

"Is it going to take a long time, because I'm . . . ?"

"That depends on you and your wife, sir. If you answer my questions without prevarication, it'll soon be over."

"Sit down. Smoke if you like. The sooner we get down to it, the better."

Littlejohn lit his pipe and Knell did the same, but Knell wasn't quite at home. No wonder! It was his first big case!

"Mrs. Norton. . . . I want you to tell me quite candidly who really was the father of Nancy Cribbin."

The question was so audacious that it took a little while to sink in. Norton was taken off his guard. Somehow, it was obvious that he knew the answer already. Perhaps his wife's black eye had been the cost of the revelation. But the sudden question had come as an embarrassing shock.

"What do you mean?"

Although Norton was beginning to bluster again, the answer to it all came from his wife. The patience cards slid from her fingers, she made a little whimpering sound, and then rose unsteadily.

"I can't . . . I can't bear it. It's more than mortal woman can stand. Will you let my husband tell you, Mr. Littlejohn? I've told him all there is to tell. I feel ill. I think I'll go to bed."

It was perhaps the best way out. Far better than trying her beyond endurance, perhaps having to bully her.

"Of course, Mrs. Norton. Perhaps Mr. Norton will see you safely to bed and then return and discuss everything with me. I'm very sorry, but you realize, don't you, that I must know everything now?"

"Yes. Mr. Norton will tell you. . . ."

Norton rose, still sucking the cigar, which hung from his lips like a baby's comforter.

"If I agree to this, you'll see that it's the last time my wife is bothered. It's breaking her down and I won't have it."

No use arguing or trying to show Norton that if he hadn't been so arrogant and obstructive, the whole affair would have been settled long ago.

"We'll wait until you come back, sir."

She gave them a wan smile as she left on Norton's arm, slowly, looking ready to collapse, a woman made sick by the weight of secrets and the Nemesis of a brief drunken act of passion long ago.

"I'll be back."

They could hear him go to the bar for brandy, tread heavily upstairs, open and cross the room on the first floor. Voices, more footsteps, and then

Norton was back.

He seemed somehow relieved as though, like his wife, about to unburden himself once and for all of the causes of his recent unhappiness. But for a man used to bullying and ordering his underlings about, it was going to be a formidable ordeal.

"What do you want to know?"

Norton sat down again, looked at the papers filled with neat figures, and with a gesture of disgust, thrust them from him.

"Let's have a drink."

Highly strung and unable to wait, he went to the bar himself and, without consulting the other two, returned with glasses, a bottle of whisky, and a siphon of soda.

"Now. . . ."

He passed round the drinks, downed his own stiff one in two swift gulps, looked better, and filled himself another.

"You were asking about Nancy. She's the child of Morrison, the retired shipowner in Castletown."

He said it quietly and sensibly, obviously anxious to get the distasteful part of the interview over.

Littlejohn nodded.

"I guessed that."

"I can't see how you *guessed* it. Who told you?"

"Nobody. In the course of the investigation, it became obvious. Crennell himself, for instance. What you'd call a good man, religious, straight. Hardly the sort to seduce his own sister-in-law. . . . But that's a minor point. However decent a man might be, he's bound to have his moments of weakness. Circumstances. . . . Champagne. . . . A lovely woman, also under the influence of champagne. . . ."

"We'll forget that part. Don't for God's sake, go into details. Remember the woman is now my wife."

"I'm sorry, but you asked me, you know."

"She told me everything the other night. There was no question of forgiveness from me. I knew Nancy was illegitimate all along. I'm glad it wasn't Crennell. I liked him and I wouldn't want to be reminded of it every time I think of him."

"Nancy isn't a bit like Crennell. . . or your wife. She's a Morrison. The sister of Mrs. Grebe-Smith, in fact. They're very much alike and the first

time I saw Mrs. Grebe-Smith, I wondered where I'd met her before."

"Well. . . . Now that's settled. . . ."

Norton's eyes strayed to the income-tax papers again.

"Nancy knew who her father was?"

"My wife told her last week just after we got here. You see, Nancy and Cribbin had been pressing Crennell for money to carry on the farm. Nancy thought he was her father and, of course, would help. Having brought her up, Finlo naturally behaved like a father. He would have given his last penny away to help her. But, as my wife confessed to me, she told Nancy the truth and said it wasn't fair to take the old man's money. It was high time somebody told Nancy who her father really was. She's old enough to know. It ought to have been done before."

"The secret was kept tightly."

"Of course. Only Crennell, his late wife, my wife, and Morrison knew. Oh, and Morrison's confidential clerk, a fellow called Finch, who looked after the money side. They're all Manx and they're religious and superstitious. Morrison made them swear on the Bible that they'd none of them say a word of what happened or who Nancy's real father was."

Littlejohn knocked out his pipe and re-filled another.

"Let's get this straight. Large sums of money passed, didn't they? Amounts of five or six thousand, let's say. Am I right?"

"Yes. The whole business might have been the subject of a legal bond, but Morrison simply took their oaths himself and trusted them. I've no doubt others in the town guessed. As you say, Nancy's not like either Crennell or her mother. . . . But nobody openly breathed a word against Morrison. He was so well thought-of. The swine! To bring all this about and then slip out of his responsibilities the way he did! Well. . . . Before I leave, I shall have words with Mr. Morrison. It's only his wife's death has prevented me doing it before. When my wife told me, I saw red."

He drank off his whisky and filled all three glasses again. Knell regarded his drink gingerly, like one who anticipates an orgy.

"Do you know exactly what happened in sequence in this *Manninagh* affair?"

"I'll tell you what my wife told me. I was here at the time, too, which makes it all the more unpleasant for me, because I was in love with her even then. . . ."

The drink was softening up Norton and revealing another side. He was getting a bit sorry for himself and seeking someone to take into his confidence.

"We arrived back from Cannes after the maiden voyage of the yacht. It was folly of Morrison to buy the boat at all. But he was always one who must have what he wanted. Shipping was at a low ebb and he couldn't afford her. Not long after he found himself unable to keep her and had to lay her up till better days. . . . "

"There was the homecoming party?"

"I'm coming to that. Finlo's wife was strait-laced and wouldn't come because there was to be champagne. Mary came with Crennell. She was different from Ethel . . . a bit wild in those days; it was a great part of her attractiveness as well as her good looks. I could see at the time that Morrison couldn't keep away from her. He was married, but the champagne made him forget it. Crennell and Mary stayed to tidy up after the party and Mary made some excuse to remain behind when Finlo left. It came out later, that Morrison had asked her to stay. This is very unpleasant for me. . . . "

"Let's pass it over then. What happened next?"

"When Mary found out there was a baby coming, she told her sister everything. There was a real hullabaloo between the women and Finlo got to know. He went straight to Morrison."

"And all was arranged?"

"Yes. Morrison was a married man with children, a man very highly thought of on the Island, and with a very charming wife of whom he thought the world when he was sober. If it came out, his family would be broken up and suffer, because things like that aren't lightly regarded over here. And damn' right, too. They shouldn't be. It was then that Crennell offered a solution. He thought there was nobody like the Morrisons, he and Ethel had no kids, and he said he could live down the scandal better than a public figure like Morrison. His wife was the only stumbling block. She wouldn't hear of Finlo taking the blame. But Finlo said he'd have no child of Mary's born away from here and stowed in an orphanage or something. Then, Morrison talked money and Ethel agreed. She was a bit avaricious and the offer overcame every objection."

Through the window Littlejohn watched the little boats coming in with the tide after a day's fishing. Men busy with ropes and tackle and sails, stringing up their catches, putting the lobsters in baskets. The sun sparkled



on the water and lit up the stretch of Santon Head and the rocky waterline. A 'plane from the mainland turned in the wind to land at Ronaldsway. Two old seamen talked at the corner of the road and a younger one arrived with a pot and brush to paint the keel of a boat hauled up above the tide-line. All so much more in keeping with Finlo Crennell's serene existence than all this sordid domestic mix-up in which he'd become involved.

"Morrison gave Mary two thousand pounds for herself, and, for taking responsibility for Nancy, the Crennells got almost four thousand. That was to see Nancy's upbringing through as well, because it was agreed that the whole affair would never be raised between them again. Nancy would henceforth be Finlo's and Mary's child."

"But part of the money paid over was in diamonds?"

Norton gave Littlejohn a thin, awkward smile, doubtless remembering his black eye.

"Yes. The Morrisons had, as I said, fallen on bad times with the slump in shipping and but for the return of Morrison's brother from the diamond mines . . . Kimberley, I think . . . they'd have been in queer street. The brother died and his money repaired the family fortunes till trade improved."

"But how came Crennell to get the diamonds?"

"Morrison was desperate for money when his brother came home, it seems. And the brother had little ready cash until his Kimberley affairs were liquidated. He'd had to leave in a hurry because of his health; he came home to die. He had some diamonds with him which he gave his brother to sell and realize funds for the settlement. When Morrison told Finlo, Crennell said he'd take the stones; they were as good an investment as anything else. . . ."

"Rather naïve of him. . . ."

"He trusted Morrison and his valuation, I guess."

"You seem thoroughly *au fait* with it all, Mr. Norton."

"After the affair on the *Victoria*, I made my wife tell me everything . . . the true parenthood of the child, the diamonds which had got me in trouble with the police, Nancy . . . everything. . . ."

"Returning to when your wife told Nancy who her real father was. . . . Cribbin must have overheard."

"Why?"

"He started a blackmail game. . . ."

"Morrison?"

"I think so."

"Then . . . then Morrison is the murderer?"

"We're not quite there, yet. And now I'll tell you something else. Lucas Finch, the man you said was in the secret as finance man of the Morrison family, took a shot at me with a rifle this morning. . . ."

"No!"

Another glass of whisky for Norton; Littlejohn and Knell said they'd had enough. The Big Shot, now mellow, was enjoying himself.

"Why should he do that?"

"He'd surely not killed Crennell, Littlejohn. He was Finlo's pal."

"I think he guessed I was on the track of Morrison. I'd mentioned the diamonds to him last night. He thought I was getting too far."

"So, out of loyalty to Morrison, he tried to kill you."

"Out of loyalty to himself, probably. All he's got is a pension from Morrison between him and starvation, I believe. If I arrest Morrison . . ."

"What do you propose to do now? Arrest Morrison and Finch?"

"Finch will be a bit awkward. He said he was shooting ducks, although the ducks seemed to be gulls, jackdaws and myself."

Norton guffawed until he nearly choked. The idea of Littlejohn getting shot tickled him to death.

"Anything else? If I can help bring this home to Morrison, I'll be damn' glad. He's got away with everything so far. He's not getting away with murder."

"Leave that to us. And, mind you, not a word about this. Not even to your wife, till I say it's right to do so."

"Right. I hope we'll soon be able to get back home. When can we go? My business needs me."

"I'll let you know."

"As soon as you can. Remember. . . ."

They rose to go as Norton's hand reached again for the whisky. He tried to rise.

"Don't bother. We'll let ourselves out. Thank you for your help, Mr. Norton."

Already Norton was drawing the income-tax papers to him and fumbling for another cigar. The door closed between them.

As they made for the hall and the main door, Littlejohn saw Mrs. Norton, still pale and shaky, descending the stairs, holding the handrail. She beckoned him.

"Shhh. . . ."

Her fingers on her lips.

"I heard you from upstairs leaving the room. I was lying dressed on the bed, so thought I'd come down just to thank you for being so kind. We mustn't disturb my husband again; he's very busy. The mail has been a large one, so I mustn't let him know I'm down. Is everything all right now? Has he told you all you want to know?"

Her tired eyes searched the Chief Inspector's face anxiously.

"Yes, I think so, Mrs. Norton."

"You must forgive his abrupt way. He has had a very trying life with hard work and worry. And I am much to blame. You see, but for the course of events . . . you understand, I know. But for the course of events, we would have married long ago. He loved me in the old *Manninagh* days and has been true to me all his life. He waited for me, Mr. Littlejohn. I can never repay him enough for his love. You understand why I was anxious that he should tell you everything and rid himself of the burden of trouble all the recent happenings have caused. . . ."

Tears ran down her cheeks and, as she drew close to the Chief Inspector to shake his hand, he got a blast of brandy. She had taken too much.

As she spoke, the door of the sitting-room opened, and Norton stood on the mat. He reeled a little and joined them.

"What's all this? What are you doing down here?"

"Just saying good-bye to Mr. Littlejohn, Nim. He's been so kind. I couldn't let him go without a word of thanks, seeing that this is the last time he'll need to question us."

"Well, tell him good-bye and get back to bed. You're not fit to be down here."

He took her arm and led her upstairs again.

The landlord of the *Dandy Rig* was standing on the seafront with a bucket of crusts with which he was feeding the swans.

"You going, sir? Queer pair, the Nortons, aren't they? Believe in drowning their sorrows, and no mistake. He's gone through a bottle of whisky, except what you've drunk with him which wasn't much, I'll bet,

from the look of you, in less than an hour. And she's had another couple of double brandies in her room since he took her one up when you arrived. Rum couple. . . ."

Squabbles, black eyes, bruised wrists, drinking bouts. . . .

Littlejohn agreed. Since Mary Gawne betrayed Nimrod Norton on the *Manninagh* years ago, they'd had their share of sorrows and things they wanted to forget.

## MASTER AND MEN

"AND now for Morrison. . . . It's an awkward day, just after his wife's funeral, but there's nothing else for it. Meanwhile, Knell, take a constable with you, get the diamonds from the Douglas police, and bring them here to me. I want Norton to value them."

The pair of them parted at the castle gates and Littlejohn went on to Framley Lodge.

Dusk was falling over the town. A melancholy half-light over everything. The trees round the great house looked like twisted limbs reaching from the earth, which smelled of autumn damp and dead leaves.

There were already lights in the rooms; the hall, the library where Littlejohn had so recently met Mrs. Morrison, and another smaller window at the side of the house. Upstairs, more lights, where presumably the children of the Grebe-Smiths were either playing out of the way, or being put to bed.

Littlejohn rang the bell, asked for Mr. Morrison, and was told by the maid to wait in the hall.

Morrison appeared from the library. All the life had left him. An old bowed man, he had aged ten years in a week.

"I'll be all right. No, I'll manage. . . ."

He sounded to be ending an argument already begun with the occupants of the room, whoever they might have been. An argument probably started because they wanted him to tell Littlejohn to go away and come again another day.

"Shall we go in my study?"

Morrison indicated the next door.

This was more like an office, with a large mahogany desk, a swivel chair and a number of smaller ones, book-cases and filing cabinets, and pictures of ships, framed, on the walls.

Littlejohn apologized for disturbing Morrison.

"I realize . . . on such a day, sir. . . . But this is of most vital importance to the cases I'm on. There's no time to spare."

"I understand. A cigar?"

Morrison passed across a large box, took one himself, and offered one to Littlejohn, who, however, declined.

"Now. . . ."

"I have called alone, sir, out of respect for your present position and grief, so I shall not caution you, nor use any formal words of arrest. That will come later, if necessary. But I must tell you, that you are under grave suspicion in connection with the murders of Crennell and Cribbin and I hope you will answer all my questions honestly . . . or else show me the door. In which case, I must warn you, that I shall at once return with a colleague, caution you, and arrest you."

Morrison fixed his eyes on the burning end of the cigar he held between his fingers. His expression of resignation did not change. He looked like one whose cup of misery had overflowed and any addition to it would make no difference.

"Go on. . . ."

"You are the father of Nancy Cribbin, formerly Gawne."

"Who told you?"

"Her mother."

"Very well. I don't mind who knows now. My wife never knew, and that was all that mattered. Thanks to the great fidelity of Finlo Crennell, my wife never paid for my folly by a moment's sorrow."

A shade of doubt seemed to enter his eyes.

"If she guessed, she never even hinted at it. Now she is gone, I am free of one fear, at least. Every day has been a nightmare of anxiety lest her trust in me be broken by some chance word by a gossip or ill-wisher. It's over now."

His voice was tired and monotonous.

"So, you see, it doesn't matter."

"Only a small body of people you could trust knew of it. Nancy's mother, Crennell and his wife, Finch, yourself. . . ?"

"Yes. Did Mary tell you that, too?"

"I found it out from one place and another. Nancy also knows."

"I agreed to that, only in case of dire need and then to Nancy only."

"Her husband found out. He overheard Mrs. Norton telling her daughter. Then, he began to blackmail you?"

"Yes. He wrote a letter anonymously, telling me to leave a parcel of five thousand pounds in notes in the doorway of an empty house in Quay Lane, and to go at once. He would collect it and I must not try to find out who he was, or he'd tell the truth about Nancy Gawne."

"You followed instructions?"

"No. What harm could he do? The reason of blackmail was over. I only cared for my wife. Rather than she should know, I'd have killed him. But he couldn't get at her, try as he would. Only a week before I received the blackmail letter, the doctor had said my wife might die at any time. She was confined to the house and attended only by a nurse and maid we could trust, the doctor, her children, and myself. I dealt with all letters to her. How *could* she get to know?"

"So you ignored the letter."

"Yes."

"Yet you knew it was Charlie Cribbin. . . ."

"Not at first. On the night mentioned in the letter Finlo Crennell vanished from the town. I heard no more from the blackmailer. Then Crennell returned and was shot. . . ."

"Did you ever suspect Crennell of trying to blackmail you? He was one of the few who knew the truth."

"Never. I knew and trusted Crennell implicitly. The idea never entered my head. But the blackmailer thought *I* thought it was Crennell and that I'd killed him because of it. He rang me up to say I'd got the wrong man and if I didn't call with the money at the same place in Quay Lane the following, Sunday, night, I'd lost my last chance."

"You traced the call?"

"Well, I persuaded the operator at Douglas to tell me whence it came. It was a man's voice speaking in a ridiculous falsetto . . . a foolish attempt at disguise. Ridiculous. I told him to go to blazes. The call came from a box at Michael. I guessed then who it was. Mrs. Norton had told Nancy, who had, in turn, told her rascal of a husband. I knew Cribbin in days of old. He was never any good."

"So you didn't murder either Crennell or Cribbin?"

"Certainly not. Is that what you base your suspicions on? I must say, you've been clever to get so far, my dear Littlejohn, but you must stop short now. Crennell was a dear friend of mine; Cribbin, I despised too much to risk my neck on. I'm sorry I've no alibis. You see, my wife is dead,

Littlejohn. I was reading to her at her bedside when Crennell died, and as for Cribbin, I don't even know *when* that happened."

"Let's leave that for a minute. You have a man called Finch on your pension roll. . . ."

"Put it that way, if you like. He is a former confidential clerk to the family and the firm . . ."

A knock on the door. Morrison rose to open it and engaged in conversation with the maid who had arrived.

"Very well. I'll come."

The door on the right opened. More conversation.

"You shouldn't have disturbed him, Kitty."

"I'll come, of course. . . ."

Morrison spoke over his shoulder to Littlejohn.

"You'll excuse me. It's the children going to bed. I always have to bid them good night when they're here. Five minutes, please."

Littlejohn heard him slowly mount the stairs. To kill the time, he strolled round the room, looking at the photographs of the old Morrison Line boats, one of the *Manninagh*, another of her on the stocks in the local shipyard, almost ready for launching. There was a fine photograph of Mrs. Morrison on the desk. . . .

Littlejohn sat down again and lit his pipe. A pretty kettle of fish! If Morrison were guilty, he was a good advocate for himself. He'd either thought it all out and made his case watertight, or else he hadn't committed the crimes at all.

"That's that. Sorry. . . . We were talking about Lucas Finch. . . ."

Morrison sat down heavily again.

"A drink, Littlejohn? No?"

He took whisky and a glass from a cupboard in the desk and mixed himself a drink.

"Yes, sir. Finch tried to shoot me this morning before the funeral. He had a rifle down on the shore and, pretending to kill ducks, brought down a gull and a jackdaw and took a pot at me as well. . . ."

Morrison showed interest for the first time.

"The fool! Whatever did he do that for? He's like Crennell was; a very devoted servant of the family. He must have thought you suspected me of the crimes. How came that idea to his mind?"



"I certainly didn't suspect *him*. He'd a cast-iron alibi. He was in the *Jolly Deemster* on both occasions of Crennell's accidents. As for Cribbin's death, the idea never entered my mind. I'd even played a pleasant game of cards with him the night before."

"Did you mention anything then?"

"Only about the diamonds. By the way, do you know anything about them?"

"What diamonds?"

"Crennell's diamonds. I believe that in the financial settlement you made with Crennell about Nancy, part of the funds were paid over in precious stones."

"That's right. I'd almost forgotten them. My brother gave them to me. He'd brought them from Kimberley. I was very short of funds at the time. Trade was bad and we had many commitments. I don't mind telling you now, that if my brother hadn't returned when he did with a fortune which he lent to the firm, we'd have been ruined. He died not long afterwards and what he left put us on our feet . . . ."

"The diamonds, sir. How did Crennell come to obtain and keep them?"

"I *had* to have the money to settle the matter of Nancy. My wife had a little, but I obviously couldn't use that for such a purpose. My brother, who was here, lent me such ready cash as he possessed, but it wasn't much, because all his affairs were in Kimberley and in course of clearing-up. I wanted the money at once. How could I say in the circumstances, 'I'll owe you the money,' or 'I'll pay you by instalments'?"

"So you paid Crennell in precious stones?"

"Yes. I scraped about two thousand to give to Mary and I told Crennell I'd give him four thousand to educate the girl and as a token of my gratitude. I handed him the diamonds as security. I'd the devil's own job to get him to accept four thousand. It seemed a fortune to him. He talked of a few hundreds, provided I saw Mary right. His wife intervened and he finally agreed. Then a funny thing happened. The stones increased considerably in market value. I was glad about it, but daren't tell Finlo. When I finally took him the four thousand, he said he'd rather keep the stones. He'd had them six months and I think he'd grown fond of them. He said they'd probably go up in time . . . such things always did . . . and he might as well have them as banknotes or savings-bank deposits. Had I told him the truth he'd have handed them back to me like hot coals. But my

brother had died and left me wealthy again and I could never repay Finlo for all his decency and faithfulness. I let him keep them."

"You mention telling the truth. What was it?"

"The stones were worth, according to my brother, about *five* thousand pounds. They were very choice and some of them rather large ones. He'd had them specially selected and polished for a necklace for my wife. I asked him to keep it a secret from her until I'd had them made-up. Meanwhile I let Finlo have them as security. My brother died soon after, leaving a similar collection for another woman of whom he never gave us the name. I had a necklace made of those for my wife. It's in the bank. She was afraid to wear it."

He chattered on and on, his grief forgotten in his memories. *Five* thousand poundsworth of fine stones! Littlejohn was staggered. Now they were probably worth twice as much!

"We have the stones here, sir. At the Douglas police station."

"Is it likely that Crennell was murdered on account of them? Could it be that somehow the skipper or mate of the *Rijswijk* knew of them from some source, and shanghaied Crennell. . . ?"

"No. Crennell was seen after the *Rijswijk* had cast-off and both men were aboard."

Littlejohn told Morrison how the stones had been to Holland and back and how the police had recovered them.

Morrison leaned forward and spoke earnestly.

"Now that the stones are back, I wish to buy them whatever the price. But I think that as they were given as security for four thousand pounds, that figure should be accepted by the executors of Crennell, whoever they might be. Those stones are mine and if I repay the loan, should be returned. . . ."

"But I understood you didn't mind his keeping them?"

"I didn't want to upset him and I'd no objection to his selling them provided *he* benefited. Now he's dead, I claim them back and will repay the loan. They will not require valuing. I'll pay the full four thousand and keep them, not for profit, but out of sentiment. They were associated with both my brother and my wife. You might see that the police turn them over in due course to me and I'll give them a cheque, after the exors have agreed."

"We'll see that the lawyers of Finlo's estate know of this. By the way, did Finch know of the diamonds and their value, sir?"

"Of course. He supervised the financial arrangements."

"Did you see much of Crennell when he was alive and about town?"

"Not of late. I went out very little after my wife took so ill."

Littlejohn thanked Morrison, they shook hands, and Morrison took him to the door. At the outer gate, Littlejohn paused to collect his thoughts. What next?

At least, there now seemed to be a plain motive. No family mix-up, no more sordid history. Just plain diamonds! Diamonds and greed!

## DIAMONDS

THE constable in charge at Castletown police station was very relieved to see Littlejohn again.

"I'm glad you're back, sir. Finch has been carrying-on something shocking since you left. He wants to see a lawyer and demands to be released at once. He says he's duties to perform in connection with the death of Mrs. Morrison."

Littlejohn realized that, during their interview, Morrison had neither protested about the detention of Finch, nor his enforced absence from the funeral. He'd been too upset by the day's events or wrapped-up in his own affairs to trouble very much about the tragedy of his one-time faithful steward.

"Bring him in, constable."

When Finch arrived from the cells he was a different man from the one who'd been placed in them earlier that day. His eyes were bloodshot and his hair dishevelled and he stood blinking before his captors with all his spirit gone.

"What am I being kept here for? It's very awkward, Mr. Littlejohn. Can I be released on bail, if I promise to come back when . . . "

"What's all the hurry? Sit down, Finch. Cigarette?"

Finch's hangdog expression lightened as he found himself treated more kindly. He took the cigarette from Littlejohn's case and accepted a light, puffing it with obvious relief.

"Don't you think it would have been very awkward for me, too, if you'd managed to hit me with your rifle shots?"

Finch cleared his throat nervously.

"I apologize about it. I'm sorry. . . . But I was at the end of my tether."

"About something I was going to discover about you?"

"Not exactly. . . . "

"Something about Morrison, then, which would have made matters awkward for you? Perhaps something which would have brought an end to the pension you receive and put you on the rocks?"

Finch made no reply, but it was obvious Littlejohn was getting warm on the trail.

"Something which would have put Mr. Morrison in gaol!"

Still silence.

"Well, I've just had an interview with him and he's been able to answer all my questions satisfactorily. . . ."

Finch threw back his head and his eyes lit up.

"Satisfactorily. . . . So far!"

"Why? What else is going to happen?"

"You are going to answer questions properly or else I shall charge you with attempted murder."

Darkness had fallen outside and there was a melancholy silence in the deserted town. The street lights were on, casting long shadows on the castle walls, odd footsteps echoed hollow as solitary passers-by went about their business. The constable, who had just been given a part in the forthcoming production of an operatic society, hummed under his breath a song he would sing, and which had been running madly through his mind all day.

His teeth, I've enacted, shall all be extracted,  
By terrified amateurs. . . .

"Before you question me, sir, I must ask you a favour. I want to see Mr. Morrison. I've something to give him."

"And what might that be?"

Finch was silent again for a minute.

"Mrs. Morrison left two letters with me to be delivered, one to her husband, and the other was to me, and both to be opened after her burial. I want to see her wishes are fulfilled. I must be allowed to do that. It's a sacred promise and whatever you do to me, I must keep it."

"Why did she leave them with you?"

"She trusted me, I suppose."

"And not her husband?"

"That's different. I did so much for her while she was alive. She asked me to do this before she took so bad and reminded me of my promise only a day or two before she died."

"Were you allowed to go and see her at home, then?"

"No. She telephoned me. She had an extension at the bedside."

"I thought she had no contact with the outside world at the end."

"That was the only contact. Mr. Morrison tried to persuade her to have the telephone removed as it excited her, but she wouldn't."

And Morrison had said he wasn't afraid of her learning about Nancy from the blackmailer, because she was absolutely cut-off from the world!

"What are these letters and where are they?"

"They're sealed envelopes to be opened after her death. They're in the bank."

"The banks have been closed for hours."

"Yes, but Mr. Forrester, the manager of the Bank of Mona, lives over the bank and will let me have them. I told him to get them out of my box first thing this morning before I left town."

"To take a pot at me?"

"Before I left town. He'll have them handy and will wonder why I haven't collected them."

Littlejohn turned to the constable.

"Just slip across to the the Bank of Mona, and ask Mr. Forrester if he'll either hand you the letters or bring them here to Mr. Finch. I'll look after things meanwhile. . . . At the same time, please ask Mrs. Cottier to come along to the police station, at once. . . ."

Then, Littlejohn took up the 'phone and asked for the *Dandy Rig*.

"Give me Mr. Norton, please. Never mind his dinner. I must speak to him."

All the while Finch sat there, finishing the stub of his cigarette, eyeing Littlejohn in a fuddled way.

"Mr. Norton? I'd like you to call at Castletown police station right away. . . . Of course, it's important. Otherwise, I wouldn't disturb you at a time like this. I haven't had any dinner either, but my business comes first. Yes . . . . Right away."

"Now, Mr. Finch. To business. You were the man who made the arrangements . . . the financial ones . . . in connection with Nancy Gawne, the so-called illegitimate child of Finlo, weren't you?"

"What arrangements? I don't know what . . ."

"Come, come, Mr. Finch. I've already had all this out with Mr. Morrison. You scraped together two thousand pounds in cash, the sum paid by Morrison as part of the consideration for Crennell's assuming Nancy's

paternity. Morrison was the father, but Crennell accepted responsibility on payment of two thousand pounds cash down to Mary Gawne, and a promise of another four thousand when Morrison had the funds. Meanwhile, the security given for payment of the larger amount was diamonds, brought over by James Morrison. . . ."

"Has Mr. Morrison told you?"

"How else would I know?"

"One of the others . . . Mrs. Norton or Nancy could have told you."

"You'll have to take my word for it."

"Very well. What you say is true."

"Had Mrs. Morrison any money of her own?"

"Yes. But Mr. Morrison could hardly ask her to put up the cash for such a purpose. He'd have had to tell her what he wanted it for and he'd rather have died than let her know. It was just a moment of . . . of drunken folly caused it all and he was fond of his own wife. Besides, there were his children and the way the family was so well thought of locally. The disgrace . . ."

"Was she very wealthy?"

"Yes. She came of a family of brewers on the mainland and her father left her a fortune."

"So, the Morrison fortune over here wasn't rescued by James Morrison . . . Diamond Jim as they called him?"

Finch thought a moment.

"Now let me tell you, Mr. Finch, your future depends on whether or not you tell me the truth. I may consider believing your excuse about the rotten shot you fired at the ducks which almost hit me, provided you co-operate."

"But I was confidential clerk to the firm and family. There's such a thing as business and personal honour. One can't tell things. I mean . . ."

"This is murder, Mr. Finch, and if you don't tell me, you'll have to tell the courts."

"The courts? Has somebody been arrested?"

"Never mind that. Did Diamond Jim rescue the family fortunes?"

"That's a thing I can tell you. He didn't. All Diamond Jim came home with was a handful of diamonds for Mrs. Morrison and little else. He was dying when he arrived here and Mrs. Morrison told him he could stay with them till he recovered . . . or otherwise. All he'd got was the stones. He had them made into a necklace for her."

"So Mr. Morrison said. They're in the bank, I believe."

"Yes. Mrs. Morrison put them in her strong-box there. Although she was a bit afraid to wear them on account of their value, she kept them as a memento of Jim. He was a very decent fellow, who'd been swindled out of his fortune by a partner in Kimberley."

"So, in effect, Morrison still lived on his wife's money after he'd lost his own."

"That's right. I oughtn't to say that, but you force me."

Littlejohn paused, lit his pipe, and gave Finch another cigarette.

"If the diamonds were in the bank in Mrs. Morrison's name, how then did Morrison get hold of them to give to Finlo Crennell as security for the four thousand pounds?"

Finch sagged in his chair.

"I don't know."

"Now, Finch. You know what this obstruction means."

"I can't tell you without Mr. Morrison's permission. I could never hold my head up again if I betrayed the family business."

They were interrupted by the arrival of the constable with the bank manager, a lean, dark man, wrapped-up in a large overcoat and wearing a cap because he was off duty. He removed the cap as he entered, disclosing a bald head fringed with grey hair.

"What's all this, Lucas? What are you doing here? Everybody was asking where you were at the funeral."

"It's just a misunderstanding, Mr. Forrester. I'll soon be out. All a mistake. . . ."

"Anything I can do? I'm a J.P., you know."

Mr. Forrester gave Littlejohn a keen look as though to remind him not to go too far.

"No, Mr. Forrester. Have you got the letters?"

"Yes. Here they are."

The banker handed over two envelopes with a blob of red wax on the flap of each.

"That's all, and thank you, Mr. Forrester. I'll call and tell you all about it to-morrow."

The banker was very undecided about being led to the door. He hesitated and turned twice, like one who wonders if a friend is undergoing torture.



"It's all right, Mr. Forrester. Thanks for your trouble. Good night."

"Good night, Inspector. It had better be all right, you know. . . ."

He went out into the dark again.

"May I open this one addressed to me?"

"Of course."

With trembling awkward fingers Finch tore at the seal and the paper, withdrew a single sheet of notepaper, read it, and dropped his arms by his sides. His prominent Adam's apple moved up and down as he struggled to master his feelings.

"You might as well see this."

He listlessly passed the paper to Littlejohn.

A few lines in a bold, clear hand.

Grateful thanks to Finch for his unending faithfulness and willing help. He must hand the other letter, as arranged, to Morrison. Then a final paragraph.

" . . . My husband on inheriting my estate will, you know, be able to continue paying the pension he has allowed you. But in case of any doubt arising, I have made full provision for its continued payment in my will, so you will feel secure. . . . "

"So you needn't have feared anything I might disclose or do, Finch. You needn't have fired those shots. . . ."

Finch looked up and gave Littlejohn a haggard smile.

"I don't want to discuss that now. It's of no importance. All I know is, I've lost the best friend I ever had, and she didn't forget me. She was the one I did everything for. *He* didn't count."

There were tears in his eyes and he dashed them away.

"And now, can I go and deliver Morrison's letter to him? You can send a policeman with me if you want."

"No. We'll send for Morrison and you can give it to him here."

"Very well, it's all the same to me. I know what's in it, or I think I do. And I'd like to see his face when he reads it."

Footsteps outside and the constable hurried to let in Mrs. Cottier.

"Put Mr. Finch in the other room whilst I talk to Mrs. Cottier."

The constable marched out Lucas Finch, still humming under his breath something about making the punishment fit the crime.

Mrs. Cottier was flustered. She'd never been in a police station in her life before and felt it a bit of a disgrace.

"It's a good job it's dark and people can't see me. It would be all over the town. Is it so important you couldn't have come to Queen Street?"

"Sit down, Mrs. Cottier. I only want to ask you a question."

She looked relieved. All the way she'd been wondering what she'd done wrong.

"You worked for the Morrisons at one time. Was that at the time Diamond Jim came home?"

"Yes, it was. I was a maid there and I also acted as personal maid to Mrs. Morrison. A better woman never lived. I can't believe I'll never see her again."

Littlejohn had to wait until she'd had her little weep.

"Do you remember the diamond necklace Mr. James gave your mistress?"

"Yes."

"It was very valuable and she was afraid to wear it or have it in the house on that account?"

"Yes. Mr. Morrison had a duplicate made for her in imitation stones so's she could wear it without worrying. But Mrs. Morrison wasn't that sort. She laughed when he gave it to her and said jewellery like that wasn't in her line for everyday wear. She'd wear the real stones on what she called state occasions and keep them in the bank the rest of the time. I never remember her having them out, except once when the Governor came to dinner."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cottier. That's all. You can go home now if you wish. Shall I send the constable with you?"

"Indeed, you won't. I'm not bein' seen about with any policeman. I'll find my own way, thank you."

And she stepped out into the darkness.

"Please bring Mr. Finch in again. . . ."

Littlejohn sat at the desk in the charge room and wearily passed his hand over his forehead. Matters had grown complicated suddenly and everything seemed to have boiled-up at once. He motioned Finch to sit down, too, and gave him and lighted another cigarette.

"You played cards most nights with Finlo Crennell?"

"Yes. We usually met at the *Jolly Deemster* for a drink. Crennell was as regular as clockwork. Arrived at eight and left at closing-time and, wet or fine, he always took a turn along the quayside as far as the harbour and back before he went home. A man of method, and I think he had a sentimental attachment for the old harbourmaster's house. He lived there for a long time, you see."

Finch seemed almost garrulous when it came to the lighter topics of existence. It was only when the secret affairs of his old employers entered the picture that he dried up.

"Did Finlo mention the diamonds recently?"

"Casually, one night. He said he planned to sell some stones he had and that he'd asked Mr. Norton to come over, value them, and make an offer."

"He just mentioned the stones to you; not to the other two members of your little card-party?"

"That's right. I knew he had them, you see. He was very close about them, and rightly so, I think. If it had become known he had so much wealth in his house or possession, somebody might have tried to rob him."

"And you at once told Mr. Morrison that Finlo was going to have the stones valued and probably sell them."

"Yes."

He said it very reluctantly this time. Littlejohn felt that had Finch been sure of what had gone on during the interview between Morrison and the Chief Inspector, he would have known better what to say and what not. As it was, Finch was at sea; he couldn't lie in case Littlejohn knew the truth.

"What did Morrison say to that?"

"Nothing at the time. And a day or so later, Finlo disappeared; so it wasn't much use bothering any more."

The swish of tyres and a squeal of brakes and another car drew up at the door of the police station.

"Park it by the custom-house there, sir."

It was Norton, and the constable took him and his car in hand. A minute or two later, the Big-Shot appeared, screwing-up his dazzled eyes in the light of the room. He looked uneasy and shifty, as though expecting fresh and unhappy developments.

"Here I am. I hope it's something important, because I've had to leave my dinner half eaten."

"I've sent for the diamonds to Douglas, Mr. Norton. I'd like you to cast your eye over them and say approximately what they're worth."

Norton tried not to look too interested, but it was obvious that he was as eager to see the stones as the rest.

But a change had come over Finch. He had turned ashen and a noise between a gasp and a groan escaped from him as he sagged in his chair like a beaten man.

"What is it, Finch?"

"Nothing. Nothing. I'm a bit worn out with all this. Can't you send for Mr. Morrison? I want to get rid of this letter."

"As soon as the other constable and Knell arrive from Douglas. They shouldn't be long."

A minute or two later the police car arrived. Knell looked round the room at the party assembled and raised his eyebrows at Littlejohn expectantly.

"Do you mind taking the car and bringing Mr. Morrison here? Tell him Mr. Finch, who's detained at the police station, has an important letter which he must deliver into his hands at once."

"You want these, sir."

Knell took from his pocket the silk handkerchief in which Littlejohn had wrapped the diamonds the previous night, and handed it to him. Then he left and they could hear him start the car again.

"Now, Mr. Norton."

Littlejohn opened the handkerchief and disclosed the stones, which sparkled under the lights of the room. Finch raised his head, looked at them, and then sank his chin on his chest with another faint cry.

Norton poked among the stones with a fat forefinger. He showed no enthusiasm, took two of the largest, examined them close to the light. Then he took out a jeweller's lens from his pocket, inspected the stones under it, picked up one or two more and did the same. He flung them back in the handkerchief.

"Thirty bob for the lot! These aren't diamonds; they're very good imitations of the sort worn when there's a very valuable necklace in the background and the owner's afraid to wear it."

He looked hard at Littlejohn.

"Are these the stones Van Dam brought back with him?"

"Yes."

"And they're the ones Finlo made such a fuss about?"

"Yes."

"Well. . . ."

Norton seemed speechless and the single word he uttered with a long gust of breath seemed to express the whole matter very well.

Finlo Crennell's security for his four thousand pounds had been a packet of dud stones! He'd played with them and caressed them, counted them and relied on them for a rainy day, whilst all the time they'd been mere pieces of glass. And he'd never had them valued or challenged their worth, because his old boss, Morrison, had told him they were genuine and worth four thousand pounds!

"Did *you* know of this?"

Littlejohn addressed Finch who didn't reply. He looked a sick man and too bewildered or afraid to answer.

"When you heard Crennell was going to sell his stones, you told Morrison, who realized at last, that Nemesis had got him. Had his wife died before Finlo decided to sell, all would have been right. But as it was, he'd neither money to redeem the stones because he daren't ask his wife for it, nor could he get his wife's real stones from the bank and change them with Finlo's, because the bank held them in Mrs. Morrison's name. Isn't that it?"

"I won't say anything till Mr. Morrison arrives."

"Was there a definite understanding that Crennell wouldn't sell the diamonds without Morrison's permission?"

"Yes. I can tell you that. Mr. Morrison said he'd have the money one day and redeem them from Finlo. Genuine or false stones, it made no difference. They were like a promissory note signed by Mr. Morrison. If Finlo wanted the cash, he'd first to take them to Mr. Morrison."

"Why didn't Morrison redeem them before?"

"In the first place, he hadn't the money. After the failure of the firm, with the exception of a hundred or two income from his mother's estate of which he couldn't touch the capital, he'd nothing. He depended on his wife."

"From whom he daren't ask for a loan because the whole thing would come out. I'm surprised he didn't tell her everything."

"And disgrace his children who'd got on well in the world?"

"Nobody need have known but his wife."

"You don't know Mr. Morrison. He'd never admit a mistake to his wife . . . or anybody else for that matter. He only told me because I had to raise

the first cash for his transaction with Finlo. I lent him fifteen hundred of my own. My pension was repayment."

Littlejohn looked with admiration at the little grey man sitting slumped before him. Somehow, Morrison had scrambled through life and retained his reputation and haughty arrogance through the support and fidelity of people like his good wife and his faithful servants, Crennell and Finch.

And then Crennell had discovered the truth!

"Crennell grew fond of the stones. The longer he kept them, the greater the obsession. Did you mention to him that Mr. Morrison had the first offer for them when Finlo talked of selling them?"

"Yes. He said that was understood. But he proposed to have them valued, all the same. He wanted all the money he could get for Nancy and if the stones had appreciated in value through keeping, he'd want a cut in the profit. I couldn't persuade him out of it. He said Mr. Morrison could buy them after he'd had them valued. If it hadn't been that the money was for Nancy, I'm sure Finlo would have parted with them if Mr. Morrison had given him four thousand. Perhaps Mr. Morrison could have borrowed that amount now. But Finlo wouldn't part with them before an independent valuation. He said he'd a friend, a jeweller . . . Mr. Norton here . . . who'd do it."

"And that, of course, would have brought out the whole sorry swindle."

"It wasn't a swindle, really."

"Of course it was."

"If Crennell had wanted the money for himself, it could have been arranged. He'd have taken the four thousand. But Nancy. . . . He was mad about her, and I suppose he wanted to give her the moon. As time passed, he grew fonder and fonder of her. He wasn't her father, you see, and he must have loved her with more than a father's love, although he'd have been shocked if anybody suggested it. The way he talked about her to the three of us at the *Jolly Deemster*. . . . We used to joke a bit about the old man's darling, behind his back. If she'd told him to jump in the harbour, he'd have done it. He was a good man, one of nature's gentlemen, but if anybody had done wrong to Nancy, he'd have killed him."

"Killed whom?"

Morrison stood in the doorway, his eyes fixed on Finch, who seemed to cower away at the wrath he saw there.

## THE WRATH OF FINLO CRENNELL

MORRISON entered the room slowly, his eyes fixed on Finch, as though ready to strike him. He wore a large overcoat and a broad-brimmed hat, and carried a heavy walking-stick on which he leaned as he stood. Suddenly, he turned to Littlejohn.

"You sent for me?"

"Yes. Mr. Finch, who's in custody for obstructing the police, has a letter he wishes to give you. . . ."

"Where is it?"

Finch passed it over without looking Morrison in the face.

"But this is from my late wife. What are you doing with it?"

"She gave it to me with instructions to hand it to you in the event of her death."

"Funny. . . ."

Morrison fumbled and tore at the sealed flap and extracted a sheet similar to the one Finch had found in his envelope. He took out a pair of heavy spectacles, pushed them on his nose, held the letter to the light and read it. Then, he staggered back, his face ashen. Littlejohn helped him to a chair.

"Leave me alone! Finch. . . . Do you know what this says? Do you?"

"No. But I can guess."

It was Finch's turn to be aggressive now. He looked straight at his old master, and if looks could have killed. . . .

"She says she knew all the time and in spite of it, she's left her estate unconditionally to me. Did *you* tell her? Who told her? After all these years and all the trouble I took to avoid hurting her."

Finch leapt to his feet with blazing eyes.

"Hurting her, did you say? Hurting! You feared if she got a hint of Nancy, she'd by-pass you with her fortune and leave it to her children. Hurt. . . . You talk as if your heart was brimming over with charity, whereas . . ."

"Silence! Who told her?"

"Nobody told her. She'd eyes in her head and wits enough to put two and two together. You only had to look at Nancy and Mrs. Grebe-Smith to know they were sisters . . . daughters of the same father. Mrs. Morrison must have seen Nancy scores of times. To think of such a girl as the daughter of Mary Gawne and Finlo Crennell was just ridiculous."

"She wasn't a bit like me or my daughter."

"That's what *you* think. If you ask me, half Castletown probably suspected it and said nothing out of love for Mrs. Morrison. Not out of any regard for you. And as time passed, they forgot it. They'd their own affairs, more important than yours, to think about. *You* seemed to think all the world revolved round you . . . "

Littlejohn stood as much as he could of this long pent-up outburst between master and man and then intervened.

"Mr. Morrison. . . . We know all about the swindle you perpetrated on poor Finlo Crennell, who for more than twenty years hugged to himself a bag of glass he thought was diamonds, simply because he trusted you and you said the stones were worth over four thousand pounds. Finally, he decided to cash-in on them and give his adopted daughter, *your* daughter, the money which she and her husband badly needed. Instead of asking you for their value in exchange back for the fake diamonds, he was set on a valuation and a share in the profits, and he wouldn't part with the stones."

Morrison sat on one side of the table; Finch on the other. They looked like a pair of gamblers who had lost all they had and been deserted by the winners. Morrison re-read his letter over and over again as Littlejohn talked.

"Crennell told your old secretary, Finch, of his intention, and Finch told you. You realized that if Crennell discovered the trick you'd played on him, your long game of deceiving your wife was at an end. He'd tell her . . . "

Finch suddenly sat up.

"No, no. Not that. I won't have it said of Crennell. He'd made a promise, apart from the diamonds. He'd never break his word."

"I see your point. . . . You, Mr. Morrison, waited for Crennell on the quayside on the night he vanished. You made him an offer for the stones; he insisted on his obsession for a valuation and a share of the profits. You couldn't budge him from it. So, in a rage, you told him that the stones were valueless and he'd be lucky to get what you proposed to give him."



Not a move from Morrison. Instead, he read his letter again, like somebody counting the cost and finding he'd got nothing for all he'd paid.

Norton, meanwhile, sat with open mouth, listening to the unfolding of the drama in which he'd had a violent if only a minor part, like the clown who only appears on the stage to be knocked on the head or chased with a red-hot poker.

". . . When he heard your confession, Crennell's rage burst out and knew no bounds. He thought only of Nancy as the loser and saw her and her husband ruined by the trick you'd played. Not only that, he thought of his precious stones, which after all his joys and hopes in them, had proved to be mere sparkling pieces of glass. In his wrath, he struck you and you . . . you struck him back, probably with *this*. . . ."

Littlejohn took up Morrison's heavy stick which had been lying on the table and weighed it in his hands.

". . . . He fell back and over the quayside into the water. There you left him to drown. Better dead. . . ."

Still no move from Morrison. He looked to have made up his mind about something; either some kind of defence or mere resignation.

"When you heard Crennell had been picked up by the *Rijswijk*, and was coming back to Castletown, you didn't know what to do. Certainly, you thought, he'd face you and accuse you, if he didn't tell your wife the whole wretched story. Instead, your blow or the one he got when he fell, had taken away his conscious memory and he was like a helpless child. You waited for him outside the house, but the police and his friends were around. You didn't run him to earth and alone till he got outside his favourite public-house, and there you shot him in cold blood."

It was like being in another world from the quiet, sane place just beyond the threshold of the police station. Outside, people were passing on their ways for an evening's pleasure. Voices, greetings, laughter. The town going-on as though Morrison and his shabby affairs meant nothing at all.

The circle of faces in the charge-room. Two constables with wide-open eyes, watching an important case being unfolded and tidied-up by a famous man from Scotland Yard; Knell, who'd forgotten to take off his hat and whose cold pipe still hung from his teeth, his eyes shining with a kind of quiet pride; Finch folded-up in a kind of grief for his old friend Finlo and the family he'd faithfully served, and, now that the mistress had died, was on the brink of total ruin. And Norton sucking a dead cigar and

flabbergasted at the turn of events which his wife's folly had started years ago.

"I don't know properly what happened next, but Charlie Cribbin, a wretched walking-on part, a nonentity in this tremendous drama, was in Castletown and anxious to see Crennell and get the money he'd been waiting for. When he heard Crennell was back, he came here hot-foot. He had also tried to blackmail you, Mr. Morrison, and you'd called his bluff . . . or, at least, you told me you had. He spent the whole evening trying to get hold of Crennell for a quiet word. He hung around the house in Queen Street and now and then, called back at the *Trafalgar Inn* for a drink. All the time, Crennell was occupied with the police, his friends, Mrs. Cottier, until at last, Mrs. Cottier left him for a minute or two. Then Crennell slipped out. Cribbin either wasn't there when Finlo left, and, finding the house empty, hurried to the *Jolly Deemster*, which he knew Finlo haunted, or else he followed Finlo and didn't catch him up in time. Whatever he did, Charlie came on the scene just in time to see you kill Finlo. And he telephoned you later, told you what he knew, and thus strengthened his blackmail case. You went up to Druidale and hung around until you caught Cribbin alone. You found him at the old empty house there, and you shot him in cold blood, just as you shot Finlo. . . ."

Morrison raised his head at last. His jaw was set and his eyes burned.

"A very plausible tale and you must have put in a lot of time, Inspector, finding a scapegoat to enhance your reputation. I deny it all. There's not a word of truth in it. Norton, there, could just as well have committed the crimes. He'd every reason."

Norton was on his feet.

"Here. Don't you try to pin it on me. I'd nothing to do with it. Keep me out. . . . You can't pass the buck to me."

Morrison smiled sardonically and rose to his feet, his hands in both pockets, his shoulders slumped.

"Well, Inspector, if that's all, I'll be on my way. Sorry, I can't oblige . . . "

"Wait. Gabriel Morrison, I arrest you for the murder of Finlo Crennell and I warn you that anything you say may be taken down in writing and used in evidence. . . . "

"But you can't arrest me for anything. I warn you, such a step will damage my reputation locally, in spite of its being a mistake, and I shall see

that you are broken for it."

"All the same, sir, you are now under arrest. Knell. . . ."

He motioned to Knell, who didn't know what to do, but who approached and laid a hand on Morrison's shoulder.

"Don't touch me. You've no warrant!"

Morrison stepped back a pace, his eyes wild, his face set.

Just as Littlejohn moved to help Knell, there was a shot, and the police station became a pandemonium.

Morrison didn't move for a second or two, then he sagged to the ground and made a rattling noise in his throat. He had fired from his pocket and when they laid him down and opened his overcoat, they found the cloth of his jacket and his pullover blown to shreds and singed around a wound in the stomach. It looked hopeless from the start.

"Get a doctor and 'phone right away for an ambulance."

They found a doctor eventually in the house in the square where he was playing bridge and before he had done what he could to make Morrison comfortable, the ambulance arrived.

Littlejohn spoke to the doctor as he prepared an injection.

"Will he make it?"

"I don't know. You can see how he is by looking at the wound. Blood and burns and clothing. I can't tell till it's been cleaned and probed. And then there'll be an operation."

Before the doctor plunged the needle in Morrison's arm, the wounded man opened his eyes.

"Littlejohn. . . ."

The Inspector heard the faint whisper and bent his head.

"Sorry to make this mess. Got the gun when I went to see the children, but couldn't do it there with them about."

"No more."

The doctor put up his hand for silence and thrust home the hypodermic.

Littlejohn entered the ambulance with Morrison, and they set out for the hospital in Douglas.

On the way, Morrison opened his eyes again. The doctor took out his hypodermic.

"He's trying to say something."

They could just hear a whisper again.

"It was as you said. But Crennell seemed to go mad. Said I'd robbed Nancy. I hit him when he wouldn't give me the stones. . . . He persisted . . . grew angry. . . . I lost my temper. . . . Cribbin didn't see me shoot Crennell. Met me in the Square on the way home. . . . Put two and two together and telephoned. . . . Daren't have myself in his power. . . . Sorry my wife knew after all. . . ."

The doctor insisted, and the needle went in again.

That night, Morrison died without recovering consciousness.

There were one or two things to clear up and these Littlejohn attended to before he left Douglas for Grenaby.

Van Dam, under pressure again, confessed that he'd had the stones valued at Amsterdam before he left with his ship. Littlejohn had suspected as much. It was obvious that fearing even the faked diamonds would be missed when an inventory of Crennell's belongings was submitted, he'd kept them safe and brought them with him to Douglas on his next trip. There he hoped for a reward of some kind from the executors and when none was forthcoming, he was loud in his lamentations. He was fined for his offences and sailed away swearing never to return to such a parsimonious community.

The pistol with which Morrison shot himself was quickly compared with the wounds registered in connection with Crennell and Cribbin. Such was the confidence of Morrison in his cleverness and ability to get away with his crime, that he hadn't disposed of the weapon. The bullets which murdered his two victims were proved to have been fired from the gun he'd used on himself.

Finch was liberated without further charges. He'd suffered enough, but they took his rifle and his licence from him because, as the Castletown police told him, he didn't seem able to shoot straight!

And then Littlejohn returned to Grenaby. It was nearly midnight as they turned through Ballasalla and down the by-road to the village. The stars were shining and the night air was cold. The farms they passed on the way were silent and in darkness. By the faint light they could see ahead the long serene mass of the gentle Manx hills with more stars shining over their peaks.

"Another case finished, sir."

Knell seemed to regret it.

"Yes. Thanks for your help, Knell. We'll meet again at the Christening.  
..."

Knell whinnied self-consciously.

Over the bridge where the waters narrowed and rushed between the stones and where, in the sunny days, fishermen hauled out fat trout.

Under the trees to the vicarage. They could already see the lamp in the hall shining through the fanlight.

Knell dropped Littlejohn at the gates.

"I'll see you to-morrow, Knell. I'll have to come down to Douglas to square things up."

The police car whined into the distance and the noise faded away, leaving only sounds of the river, the trees, and the wind blowing at the head of the little valley.

Archdeacon Kinrade stood in the doorway, his sturdy figure silhouetted against the light inside. It was like the return of the prodigal son! The pair of them had parted early in the morning but the day had been long and trying . . . almost like a week.

"Come inside to the fire. Your supper's waiting."

The parson didn't even ask Littlejohn how the case had gone or what the day had brought. Time enough . . . *Traa di liooar*.

A warm gust of air, scented by wood smoke, met Littlejohn on the threshold and the peace of the place gathered him up. His back was to the world of crime and violence and the things men did to each other. Ahead were serenity, comfort, and the sheer goodness of the old Archdeacon, who had become Littlejohn's dearest friend.

He closed the vicarage door behind him and followed the parson in.

Dear Reader,

My name is Tim Binding. I am a novelist, but I want to tell you about George Bellairs, the forgotten hero of crime writing

George Bellairs was bank manager and he wrote over fifty novels in his spare time. Most of them were published by the Thriller Book Club run by Christina Foyle, manager of the world famous Foyle's bookshop, and who became a friend. His books are set at a time when the real-life British Scotland Yard would send their most brilliant of sleuths out to the rest of the country to solve their most insolvable of murders. Bellairs' hero, gruff, pipe-smoking Inspector Littlejohn appears in all of them.

Many of Bellairs' books are set in the Isle of Man – where he retired. Some take place in the South of France. All the others are set in an England that now lives in the memory, a world of tight-knit communities, peopled by solicitors and magistrates, farmers and postmen and shopkeepers, with pubs and haberdasheries and the big house up the road - but though the world might have moved on, what drove them to murder, drives murder now: jealousies and greed, scandal and fear still abound, as they always have.

So, if you liked this one, dip into the world of George Bellairs. In the coming months and years there'll be plenty of books to choose from. Why don't you join me, and sign up to the George Bellairs mailing list?

- First thing you'll get is a free book.

- Then, from time to time I'll send you publishing information.
- In the New Year I plan to visit the George Bellairs' archive. Who knows what I'll find there. Letters, unpublished work? I'll let you know.

So join me in forming a George Bellairs community, you can sign up here:  
<http://eepurl.com/ba6DNn>

I look forward to hearing from you.

Tim Binding